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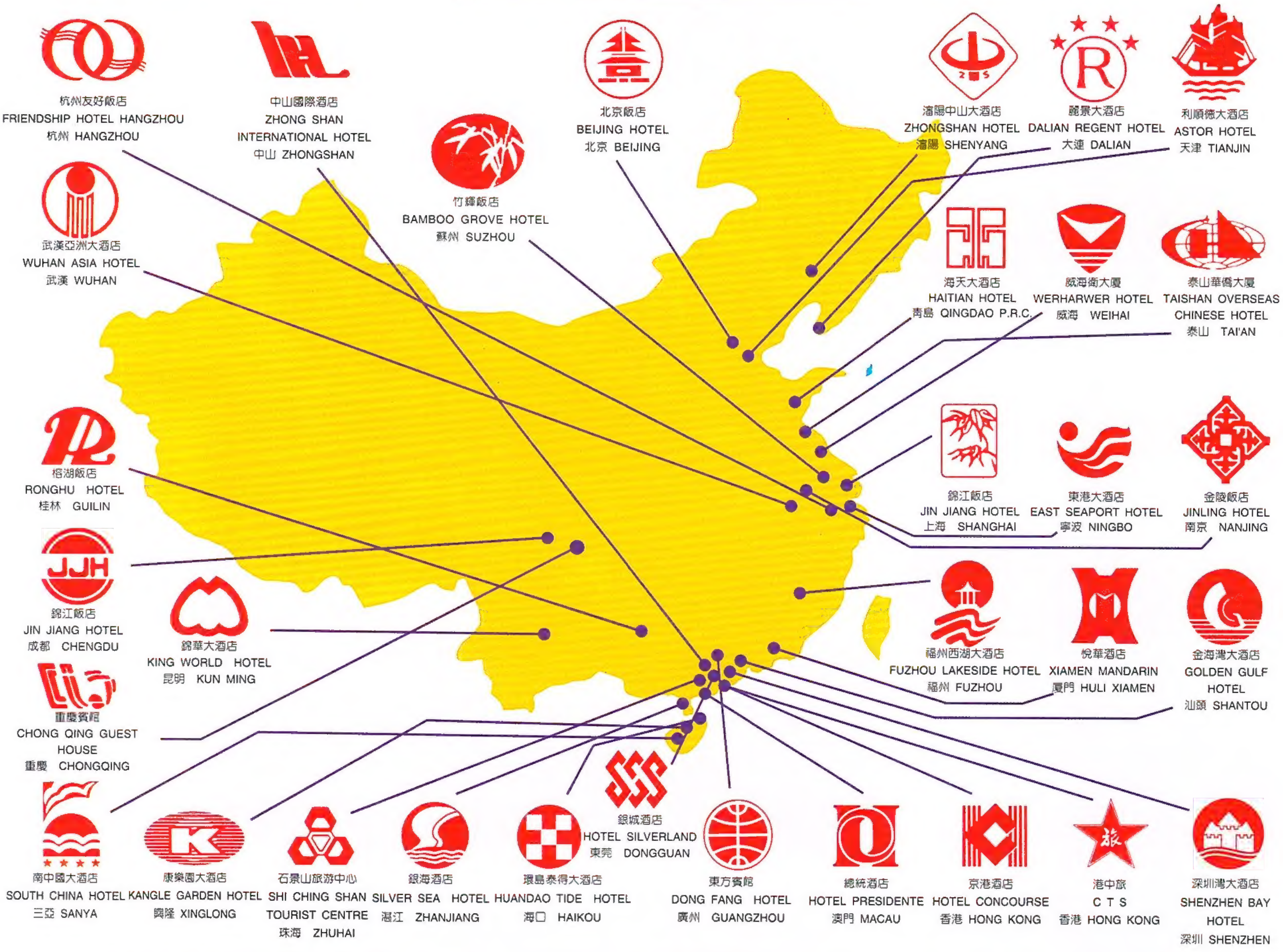
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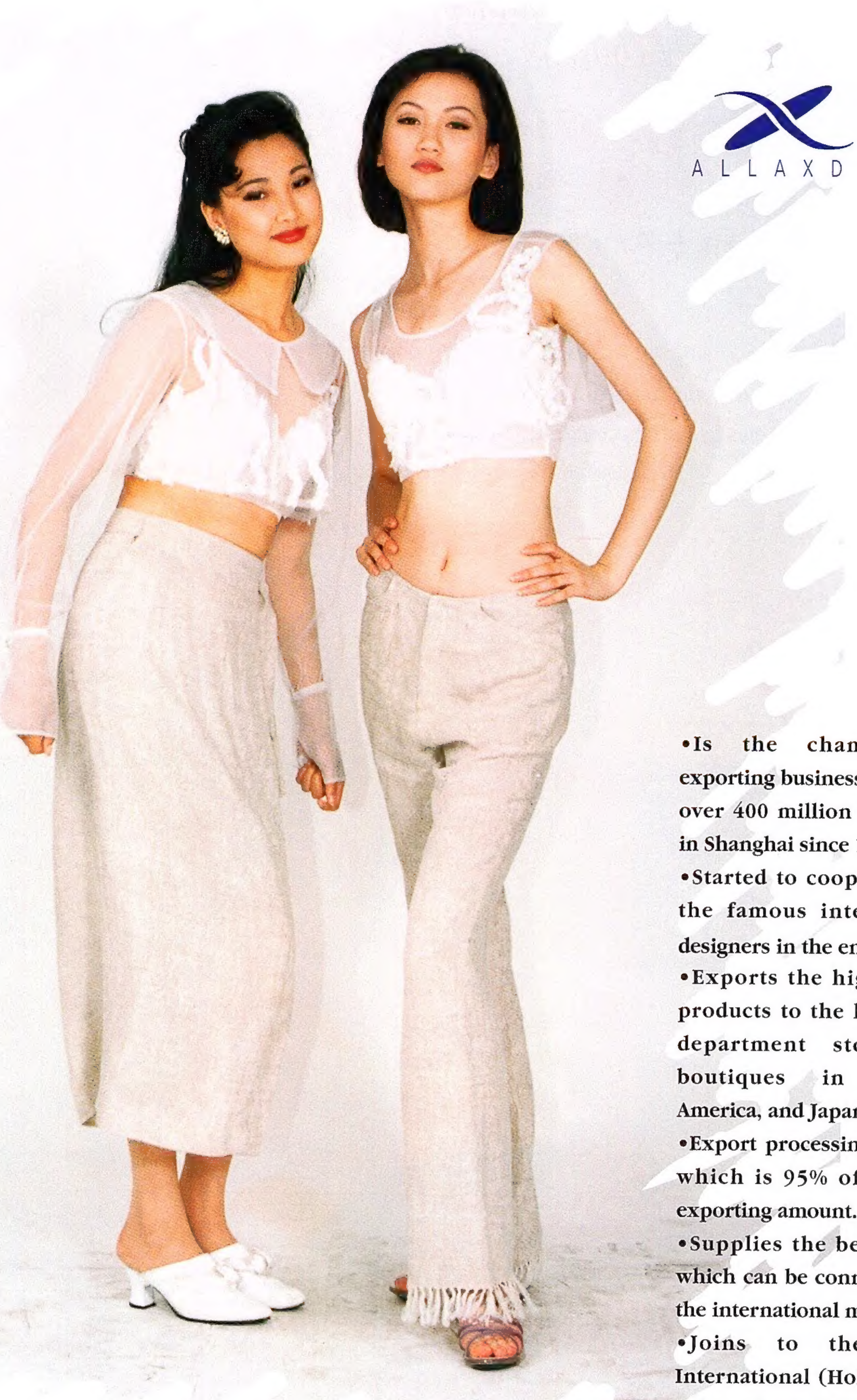

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CONTENTS

NO. 200 MARCH 1997

DISCOVERIES

Marrying – the Chinese Way 40

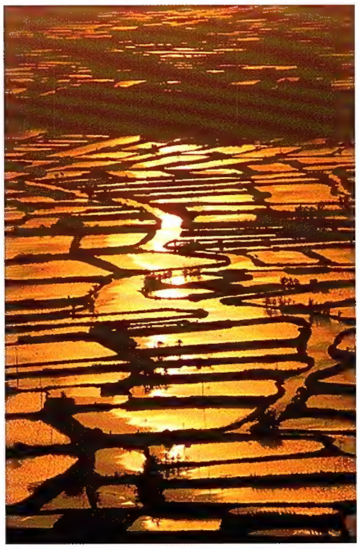
Article by Chan Yat Nin, Xiao Yi and Yan Hong

Traditional Chinese weddings are unique for their multifarious content and elaborate rituals. Such customs are all-encapsulating reflections of the social mores of the Chinese people. Today, modern society is making inroads into traditional wedding customs, but we can heave a sign of relief that some of the old, exotic marriage customs are still alive in rural areas, thereby preserving a vital part of China's heritage.

Rural Weddings:
- Tradition Lives On
- Betrothal: the Six Rituals
- The Wedding Ceremony

Modern Weddings:
- Continuation of Tradition
- Vicissitudes of the Last Few Decades
- Dwindling Family Size
- Incorporating Western Elements

Marriage Customs of Ethnic Minorities:
- Tajik, Yao, Tujia, Ewenki, Lisu, Korean, Yi, Mongolian, Yugur, Bai and Manchu



LANDSCAPES

The Most Splendid Scenic Spots in China 12

Article by Chan Yat Nin, Xiao Yi, Shi Baoxiu, Xie Guanghui and Yee Ket Choi

Across China's vast landmass there are many breathtaking vistas. In this 200th issue, we have selected more than a dozen places – each with its own unusual charm – in the hope of taking our readers on an enjoyable trip to some of the most natural and unique scenic wonders that China has to offer. These include: Tianshan Mountains and Hanas Lake in Xinjiang; enchanting Hainan Island; Zayu and the northern highland in Tibet; the Loess Plateau in Shaanxi; the area south of the Yangtse; Ejne Banner of Inner Mongolia; Yuanmou earth forests in Guizhou; Sanjiang Plain in Heilongjiang; and lastly, Zhongdian in Yunnan.

FROM THE EDITOR

200 Issues in Retrospect 9

NEXT ISSUE 3

Hao Junchen

Cover: The happy parents-in-law at a wedding in rural northern china.

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TOURISM

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中國旅遊
173
178
167
CING THE RUINS OF THE THREE KINGDOMS
12TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL
145

中國旅遊
China
Oh! Those Lakes in Heilongjiang
184
148
BEIJING TURNS THREE THOUSAND
181
184
三國古今
73

FROM THE EDITOR

200 Issues in Retrospect

It is no mean feat to produce a professional magazine and then publish it in continuation for 200 issues, especially in such a highly competitive place as Hong Kong. All too often one sees new publications emerge – only to see them disappear a short while later. However, *China Tourism* has survived and developed, owing to the sincere support of our readers. Here and now we would like to say to all of you – Thank you!

The number 200 is not our only cause for celebration – for us it conjures up the path we have trod. Many of the episodes are still fresh in our memories, as if they had happened only yesterday.

For 200 months, we have sent our photographers and reporters out on assignments to various destinations to take great pictures; while at home, our editors have worked painstakingly to make the stories interesting and refreshing. During this whole process, our subjects have been changing, and so have our staff members, but there is one thing that does not change and that is our resolve to keep the contents of this magazine refreshing.

Nevertheless, we realise that for a specialised tourism periodical such as ours, this is not an easy task – after all, we have already presented so many creative works for its 200 issues – despite the fact that China has a vast territory with varying scenery, rich cultural relics and colourful ethnic customs. But "not easy" does not mean "impossible". Some factors exist in our favour: firstly, new scenic spots are constantly emerging; secondly, there is always an opportunity to report on familiar places from a different angle; and thirdly, our readers are changing, with an increasing proportion of newcomers. So, there is still room for us to push forward. The key lies in maintaining a sensitive perspective on China, on its landscapes as well as on its new developments.

Repeated "surveys" and "discoveries" over the years mean that China is no longer as mysterious as it once was to most readers. However, many of our readers have come to expect more in-depth reports, and they may feel relieved to notice that this is just what we are concentrating our efforts on.

It is for this exact purpose that our 200th issue concentrates on a selection of over a dozen beautiful, but perhaps less well-known, scenic spots for our readers to enjoy in the hope of communicating the message that there is always more to see on the 9.6 million square kilometres of China's landscape.

In closing, our other main feature is presented to you in the hope that your Chinese New Year and Spring Festival are made even more joyous and interesting by learning about the fascinating wedding customs of the Chinese people.

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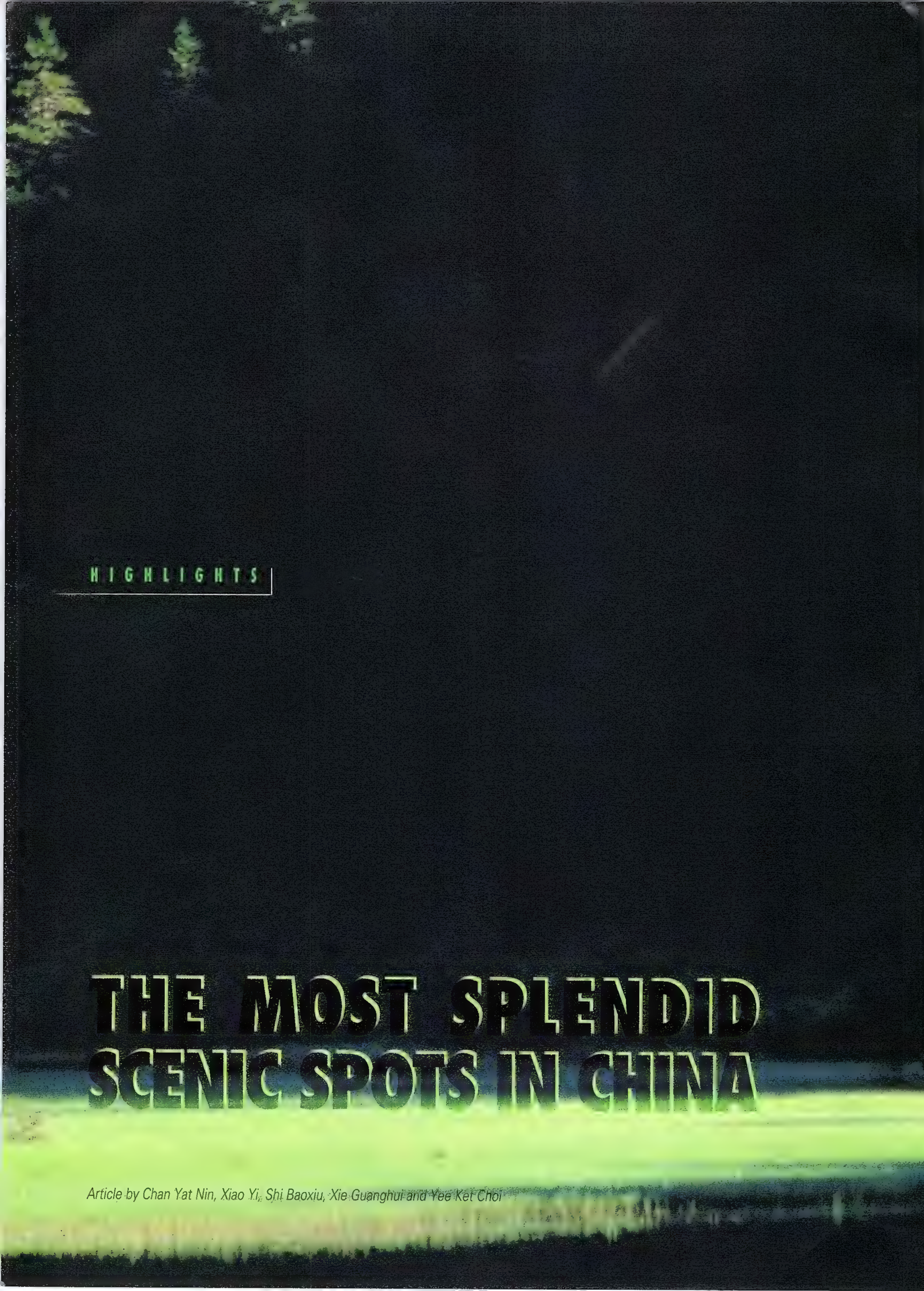


HIGHLIGHTS

THE MOST SPLENDID SCENIC SPOTS IN CHINA

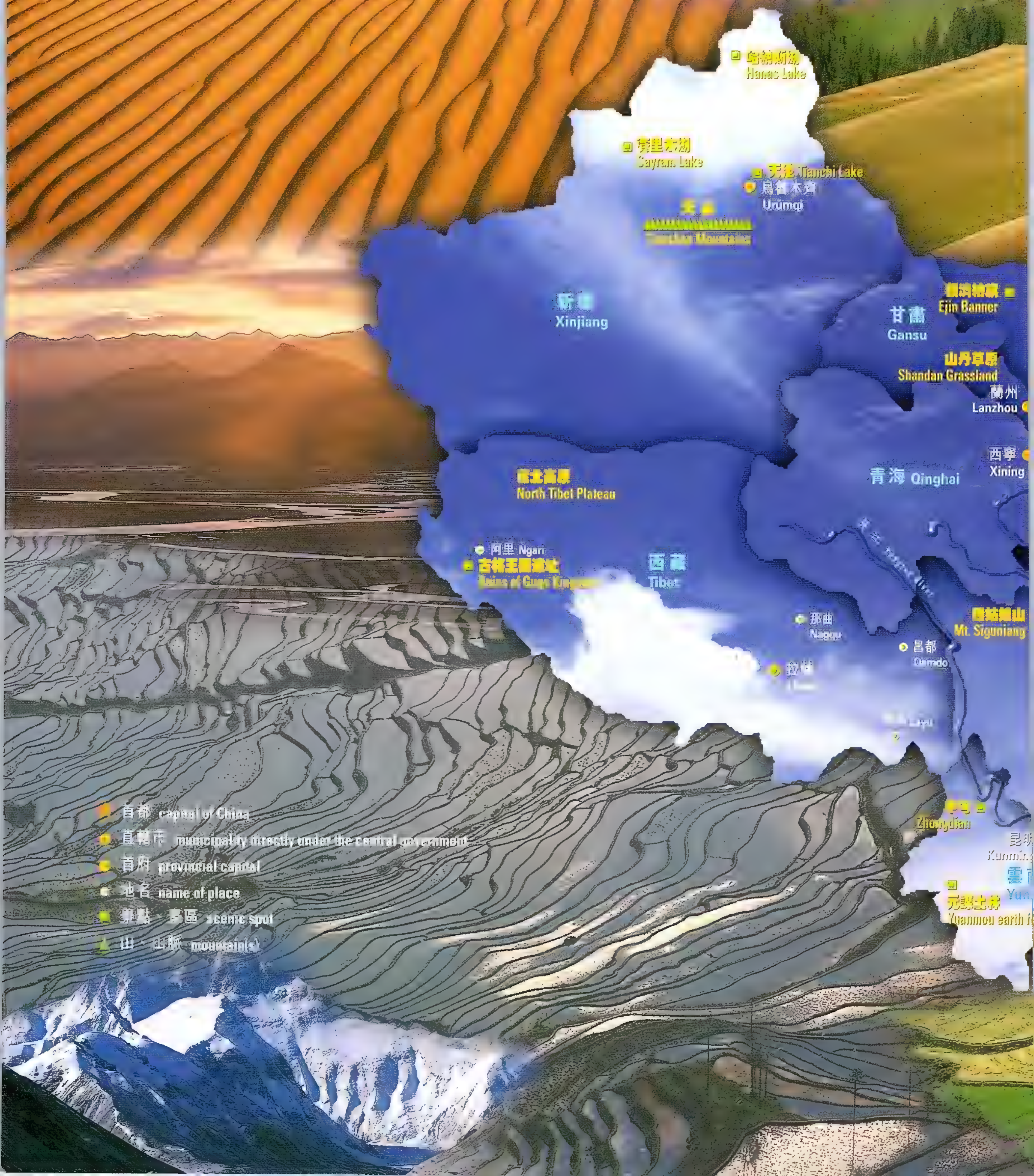
Article by Chan Yat Nin, Xiao Yi, Shi Baoxiu, Xie Guanghui and Yee Ket Choi

China's vast landmass of 9.6 million square kilometres is crowned with the highest mountains in the world; it is also embellished by expansive plains and deep basins, criss-crossed by rivers and dotted with numerous lakes. Straddling different latitudes, from north to south, China covers six different temperature belts: cold temperate, temperate, warm temperate, subtropical, torrid and equatorial. From the north-west inland to the south-east coastal areas, there are the dry, semi-dry, semi-humid and humid zones. Across this great land, there are a myriad of breathtaking vistas and natural wonders.

Since its launch, *China Tourism* has devoted great effort in presenting readers with interesting and informative material about the country, its land and its people. Now, in this 200th anniversary issue, we have avoided the most famous and well-known scenic sites such as Mount Huangshan, Hangzhou and Guilin, and instead, selected some unusual regions with their own special charm in the hope of taking our readers on an enjoyable trip to experience some of the most unique and natural scenic wonders that China has to offer.

Aba Forest, Sichuan, bathed in Moonlight (by Wang Dajun)

中國部分風光景區示意圖
SKETCH MAP OF SCENIC SPOTS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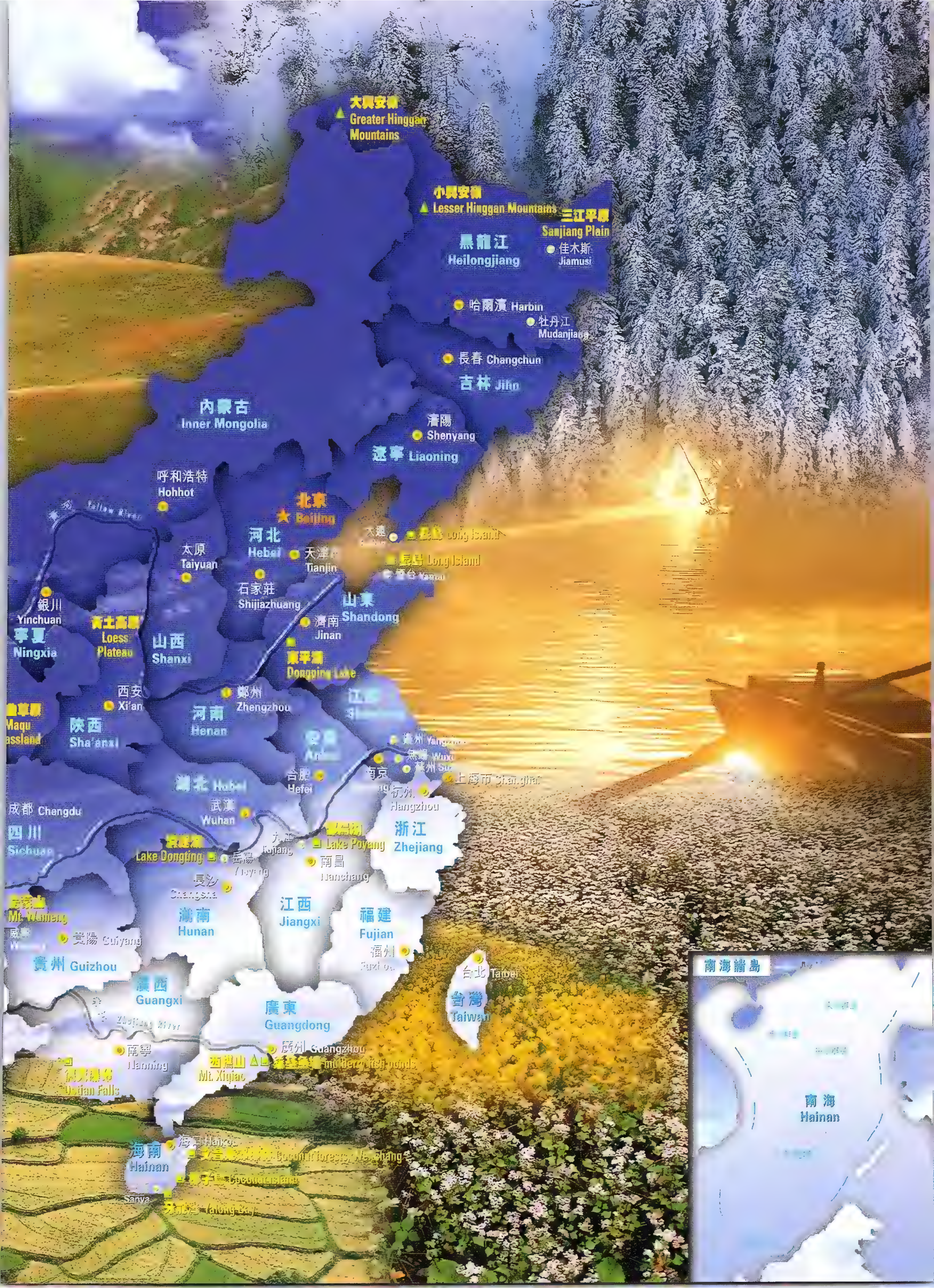

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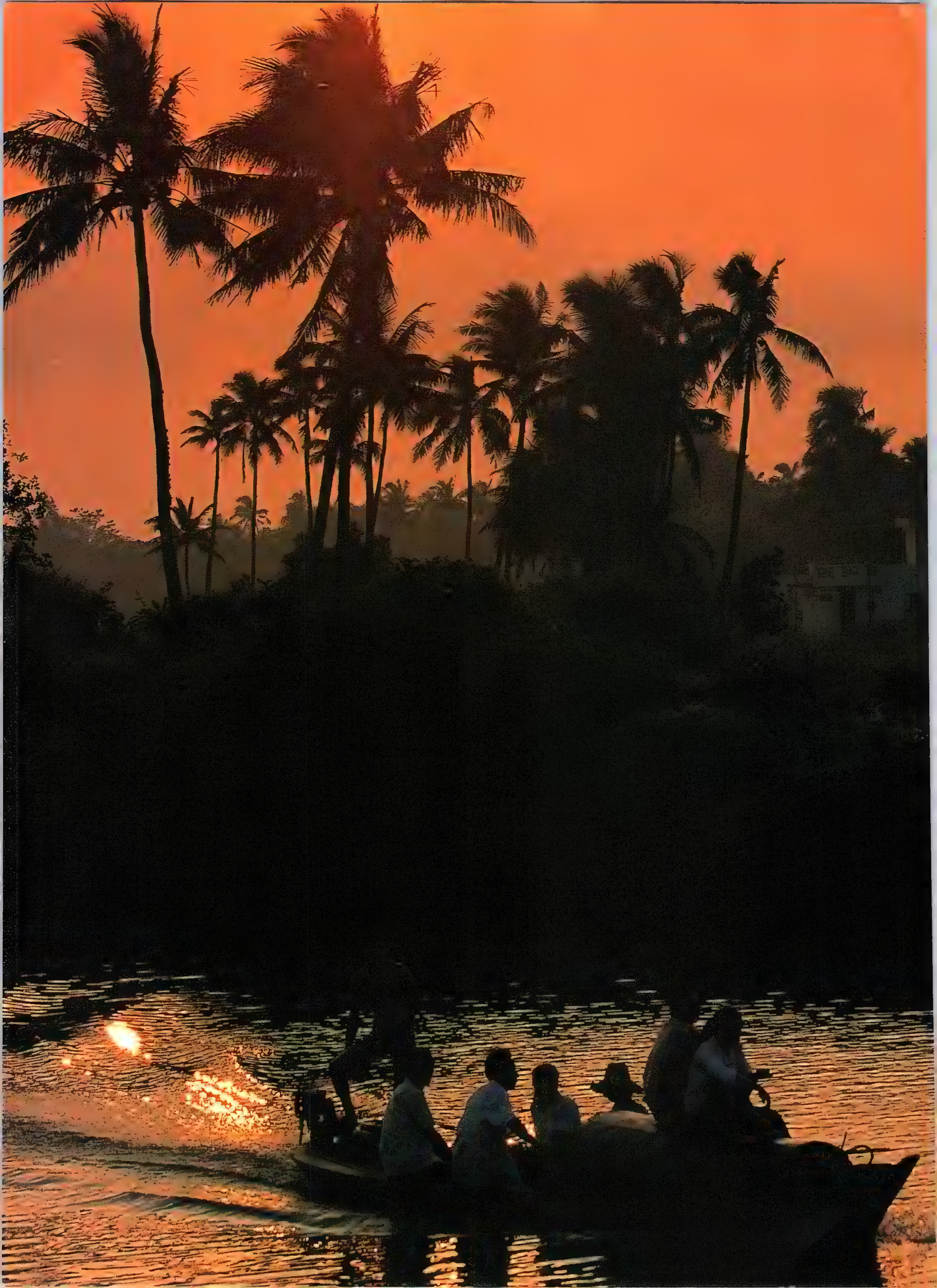
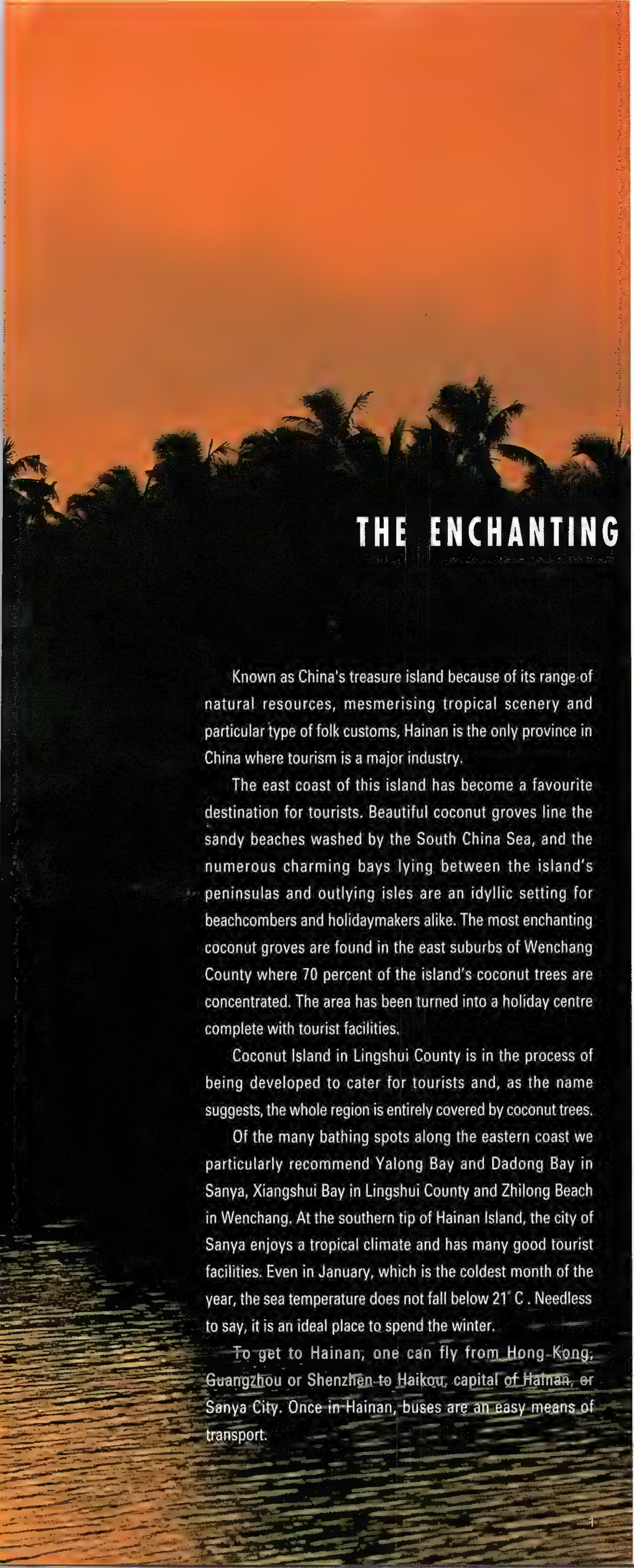
Beijing
河北
Hebei
天津
Tianjin
大連
Long Island
長島 Long Island
煙台
太原
Taiyuan
石家莊
Shijiazhuang
山東
Shandong
濟南
Jinan
銀川
Yinchuan
寧夏
Ningxia
黃土高原
Loess Plateau
山西
Shanxi
東平湖
Dongping Lake
西安
Xi'an
鄭州
Zhengzhou
河南
Henan
Maqu
assland
陝西
Sha'anxi
江蘇
揚州 Yangzhou
無錫 Wuxi
蘇州
上海市 Shanghai
南京
杭州
Hangzhou
合肥
Hefei
湖北 Hubei
成都 Chengdu
武漢
Wuhan
四川
Sichuan
九江
Jiujiang
Lake Poyang
浙江
Zhejiang
Lake Dongting
岳陽
Yueyang
南昌
Nanchang
長沙
Changsha
Mt. Wumeng
貴陽 Guiyang
江西
Jiangxi
福建
Fujian
湖南
Hunan
福州
Fuzhou
貴州 Guizhou
台北 Taipei
廣西
Guangxi
台灣
Taiwan
廣東
Guangdong
Zhujiang River
南寧
Nanning
廣州 Guangzhou
西樵山
Mt. Xiqiao
mulberry fish ponds
Detian Falls
海口 Haikou
海南
Hainan
文昌
Coconut forests, Wenchang
Coconut Island
Sanya
Yalong Bay
南海諸島
南海
Hainan





THE ENCHANTING ISLAND HAINAN

Known as China's treasure island because of its range of natural resources, mesmerising tropical scenery and particular type of folk customs, Hainan is the only province in China where tourism is a major industry.

The east coast of this island has become a favourite destination for tourists. Beautiful coconut groves line the sandy beaches washed by the South China Sea, and the numerous charming bays lying between the island's peninsulas and outlying isles are an idyllic setting for beachcombers and holidaymakers alike. The most enchanting coconut groves are found in the east suburbs of Wenchang County where 70 percent of the island's coconut trees are concentrated. The area has been turned into a holiday centre complete with tourist facilities.

Coconut Island in Lingshui County is in the process of being developed to cater for tourists and, as the name suggests, the whole region is entirely covered by coconut trees.

Of the many bathing spots along the eastern coast we particularly recommend Yalong Bay and Dadong Bay in Sanya, Xiangshui Bay in Lingshui County and Zhilong Beach in Wenchang. At the southern tip of Hainan Island, the city of Sanya enjoys a tropical climate and has many good tourist facilities. Even in January, which is the coldest month of the year, the sea temperature does not fall below 21°C. Needless to say, it is an ideal place to spend the winter.

To get to Hainan, one can fly from Hong Kong, Guangzhou or Shenzhen to Haikou, capital of Hainan, or Sanya City. Once in Hainan, buses are an easy means of transport.

1. A graceful coconut grove on the banks of Wenchang River (by Chan Yat Nin)
2. Fishing nets under the setting sun – one of the many sights on the east coast of Hainan Island (by Wang Miao)
3. Set under a blue sky, the beach is covered with snow-white sand. (by Wang Miao)

ZHONGDIAN

CHARMING PLATEAU LANDSCAPE

Zhongdian, capital of the Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province, lies on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and the upper reaches of the Jinsha River. Several dozen kilometres before reaching Zhongdian from Dali, at an average altitude of 2,000-3,000 metres above sea level, one arrives at the most beautiful section of flatland called Lesser Zhongdian. The flat terrain has caused the local Tibetans to switch to farming for their livelihood instead of husbandry. Wherever one goes, one sees numerous haystacks dotting the land, which are used as winter fodder for the animals. In autumn, flowers blossom everywhere.

Not far from Zhongdian, there is a famous white platform formed by deposits of limestone washed down by water. Further north, at the border between Yuan and Tibet, the mountain slopes are thick with huge, magnificent bushes of wild azalea flowers from May to July.

Zhongdian is a typical Tibetan farming area. Apart from the unique scenes offered by plateau farmland, one can also see vast tracts of plateau grassland as well as snow-capped mountains in the distance. Moreover, the magnificent Yellow Sect lamasery in Zhongdian is worth a visit.

Zhongdian is an important town on the Yunnan-Tibet highway and is serviced by regular bus routes. Hotels and hostels provide accommodation and dining facilities. However, one should take note that the food served in the Tibetan way may not be to everyone's taste, therefore visitors may prefer to bring some of their own.

1. **Wild azalea flowers on Baima Mountain, Zhongdian (by Chen Keqin)**
2. **Vista from Baishui Terrace (by Chen Keqin)**
3. **Farmland in areas inhabited by people of the Tibetan ethnic group (by Wang Miao)**
4. **Zhongdian Grassland dyed red by blossoming flowers (by Wang Miao)**
5. **Sunning hay (by Wang Miao)**

NORTHERN TIBET

NO-MAN'S LAND

Travelling across a vast expanse of wilderness along a 1,800-kilometre route which begins from Changdu in east Tibet and ends at Ngari in the west by way of Nagqu, one sees northern Tibet, a mysterious highland which soars to an average 4,000 metres above sea level.

In summer the area is blanketed in a trackless expanse of grasses. Herds of animals roaming about the rich verdure look like shifting clouds in the sky. The area between Nagqu and Ngari is studded with numerous limpid lakes. Further north, extending all the way to the borders of Xinjiang and Qinghai, is a no-man's land frequented only by Asiatic wild asses, goats and buffaloes.

Zada County was once home to the splendid Guge Kingdom founded by one of the sons of Lan Darma, the last king of the Tubo Kingdom. Today, the kingdom lies buried amidst a mass of crumbling walls and scattered foundations over a dusty cliff that shoots 300 metres into the sky.

Long-distance buses shuttle daily from Chengdu and Kunming (in Sichuan and Yunnan provinces, respectively) to Nagri by way of Nagqu. One may also choose to take the train in Xining, Qinghai Province, to Golmud, and then catch a bus bound for the grassland in Nagqu. There are no regular bus lines in operation from Lhasa or Yecheng in Xinjiang; in both places one needs to either hire a taxi or simply hitchhike all the way to Ngari.

Accommodation is one problem confronting the traveller to northern Tibet. Except in the county seats, there are very few hotels along the way, and the traveller has to make do with army barracks or the dormitories of highway crews, or simply stay with the family of a herdsman.

Altitude sickness is another hazard, especially in Ngari with an altitude of more than 5,000 metres above sea level. For anyone rambling in northern Tibet an oxygen mask is a must, and the traveller should take care not to catch cold. Take adequate supplies of medicine, drinking water, and warm winter clothing. Overseas travellers wishing to visit Tibet are required to apply for travel documents.

The ruins of the Guge Kingdom (by Yuan Xuejun)

The Sanjiang (Three Rivers) Plain is located in the eastern part of Heilongjiang Province. Formed by alluvial deposits carried by the Heilong, Songhua and Wusuli rivers, it is a vast expanse of flat land surrounded by precipitous mountain ranges.

The land in Heilongjiang Province boasts beautiful natural scenery criss-crossed by rivers and dotted with numerous lakes. It is particularly famous for its forest wildernesses high in the mountains interspersed with vast stretches of grasslands. The famous Greater and Lesser Hinggan Mountains are extremely rich in several species of flora, particularly Korean pine and Persian Chrysanthemum, hence the term "Green Great Wall". The Songnen (Songhua River and Nenjiang River) Plain abounds in marshland providing great opportunities for agricultural exploitation. Today, its boundless expanses of wheat fields are a really impressive sight.

As winter takes hold of the vast plains, all but a few of the big rivers freeze over. Travellers to this part of the world are amazed by the scenery created by ice and snow, which turn the place into a temporary fantasy land.

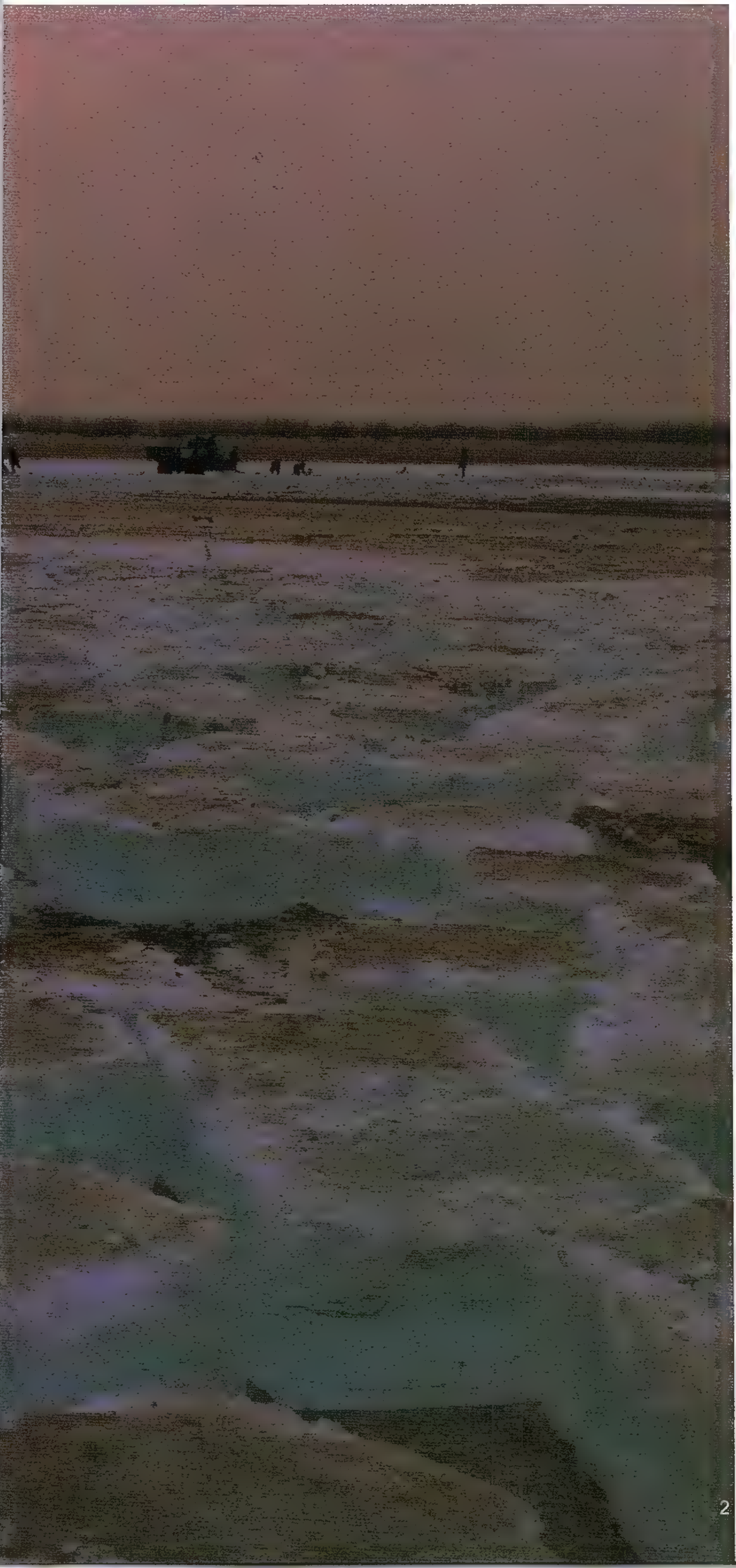
The scenery along the Heilong River shifts with the changing seasons; the Greater and Lesser Hinggan Mountains offer both mountainous and flatland landscapes, and the frozen Songhua, Mudan and Heilong rivers provide the most breathtaking views in winter.

Train and bus services are available for visitors to these places and hotels and guesthouses can be found in cities and county seats along the routes.

1. Beautiful Persian chrysanthemums growing in the Greater Hinggan Mountains (by Peng Zhenge)
2. Cutting a huge piece of ice from the Songhua River, Harbin (by Xu Xuezhe)
3. Forest scenery, Heilongjiang (by Peng Zhenge)
4. The charming scene of a wheat field in Heilongjiang (by Zhang Xiaoyu)

SANJIANG PLAIN

CHANGING PICTURES IN FOUR SEASONS



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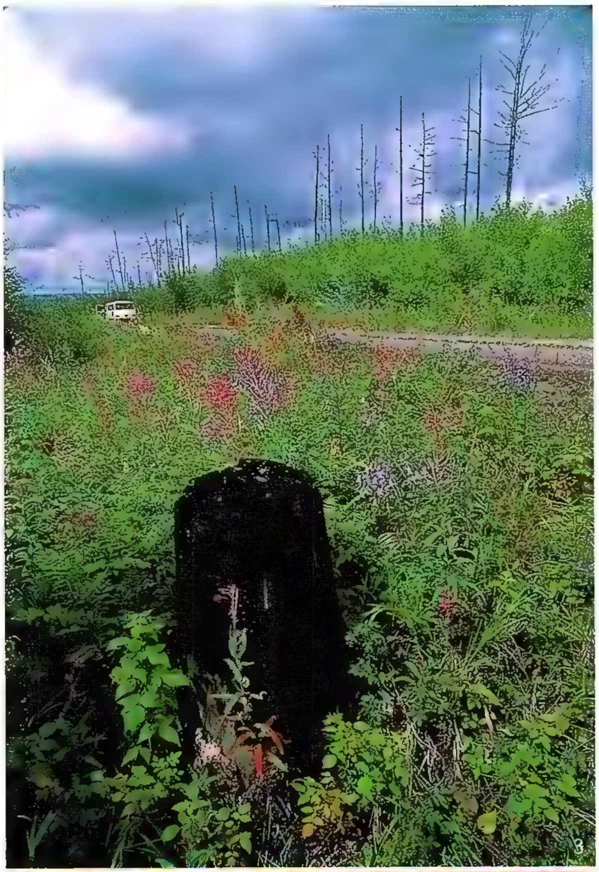

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YUANMOU EARTHEN FORESTS

SCARCELY KNOWN NATURAL WONDER

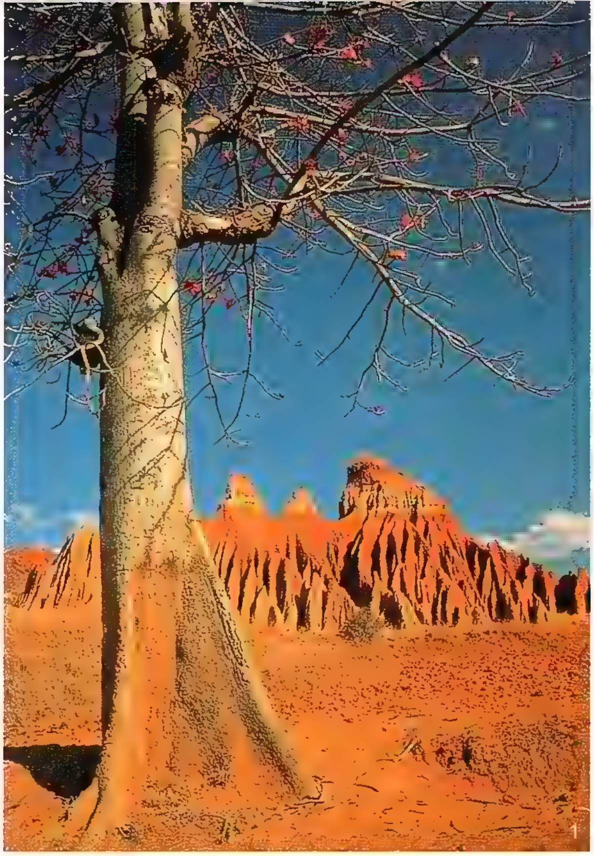
The stone forest in Lunan Yi Autonomous County, Yunnan Province, has been famous for a long time as one of China's natural wonders, but the earthen forests in Yuanmou County are much less known. Collectively, the Yuanmou Earth Forests are referred to the Banguo, Xinhua and Huxi earthen forests, which occupy a fairly large area.

Currently only the Huxi earthen forest is open to tourists, and although its forest area is small, its scenic spots are relatively concentrated. Inside its perimeter are grotesquely-shaped earthen pillars and peaks in numerous forms. Some look like European castles while others resemble fascinating sculptures in the shape of birds and animals.

The Yuanmou earthen forest is located within Yuanmou County more than 200 kilometres north of Kunming. From Kunming, one can get to the county seat by train or long-distance bus and then change to the special-line bus for the 40-kilometre ride to the forests.

Hotels and hostels are available in both the Yuanmou county seat and the vicinity of the Huxi earthen forest. All serve food. One of the attractions of staying in the Huxi hostels is the chance to see the magical sunrises and sunsets over the forests.

1. Yuanmou Earthen Forests, a scarcely known natural wonder (by Yuan Xuejun)
2. The earthen forests retain a primitive, natural look. (by Lu Linglong)



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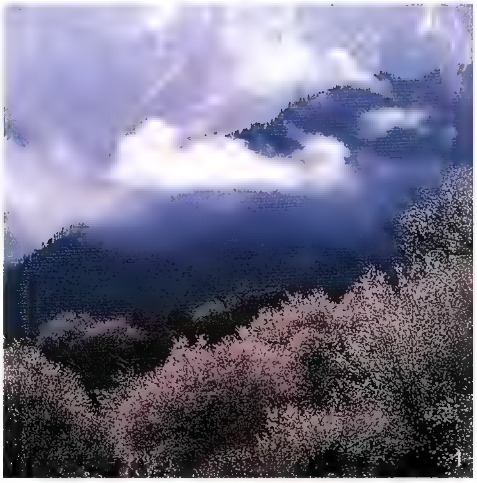
ZAYU PERCHED ON THE ROOF OF THE WORLD



Zayu is a county in south-eastern Tibet Autonomous Region which lies in the Hengduan Mountains, flanked by the Nujiang and Yarlung Zangbo rivers. Towering wooded mountains in the north-east serve as natural barriers against invading cold currents and therefore shelter Zayu on the southern slope of the Himalayas. Conversely, incoming wet air currents from the Bay of Bengal give Zayu a warm and humid climate.

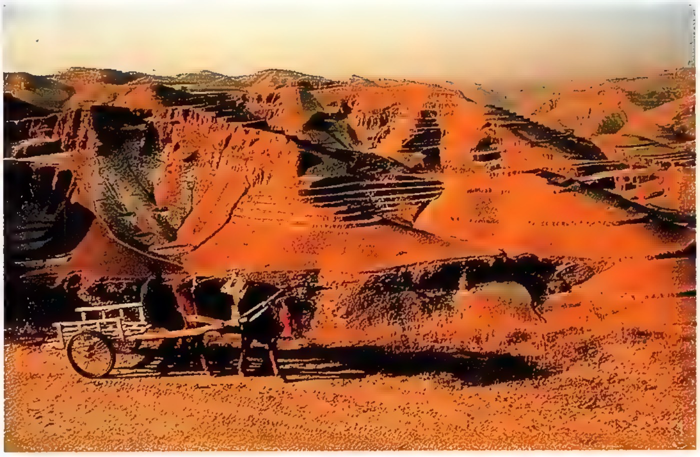
There are no cold winters nor hot summers here. More typical of this region are the vertically varied weather conditions. Within a vertical distance of four kilometres from the valley up to the mountain, one can experience dramatic changes from typical subtropical to temperate and frigid climates. The species of flora and fauna living on the slopes of the mountains vary characteristically according to their altitude.

During April and May, the land between the towns of Rawu and Zayu are clothed with peach blossom which dominate the land as far as the eye can see, but in order to cover the distance one definitely needs to hire a jeep. Rawu is on route between Sichuan and Tibet, and Yunnan and Tibet. In Zayu, a county of the Nyingchi Prefecture, one can easily find basic places to eat and sleep.

1. Zayu, the land of peach blossom (by Lin Jinghua)
2. Flowers blossom at the foot of snow-capped peaks. (by Yuan Xuejun)

LOESS PLATEAU

WHERE GOLDEN TINTS SPARKLE



On the Loess Plateau in Shaanxi Province there is nowhere more rugged and barren than Yan'an, or the areas of Luochuan, Ansai, Suide, Mizhi and Hengshan in its vicinity. The unique topography of this part of the world is accentuated by scant vegetation, scarce rainfall, incessant winds from the Mongolian Plateau in the north-west, and the tremendous soil erosion caused by the mighty Yellow River.

Xuelong Bay, situated on the Shaanxi-Inner Mongolian border in the Hengshan Mountains, is perhaps the most scenic spot of the entire plateau. The Wuding River flowing through the bay is flanked on both shores by the silken verdure of swaying willows. When winter arrives, the scenery takes on a melancholy look and the river is frozen into a silvery serpentine ribbon. The Loess Plateau looks its seasonal best in autumn, when the ripened crops dye the scenery the colour of sparkling gold.

Accessible by air, bus and train from Xi'an, bus lines operate from Yan'an to each of the above-mentioned destinations. There are many hotels and guesthouses for the traveller to choose from.

1. The yellow earth is dyed golden in autumn. (by Wang Miao)
2. Wuding River flanked by swaying willows (by Wang Miao)

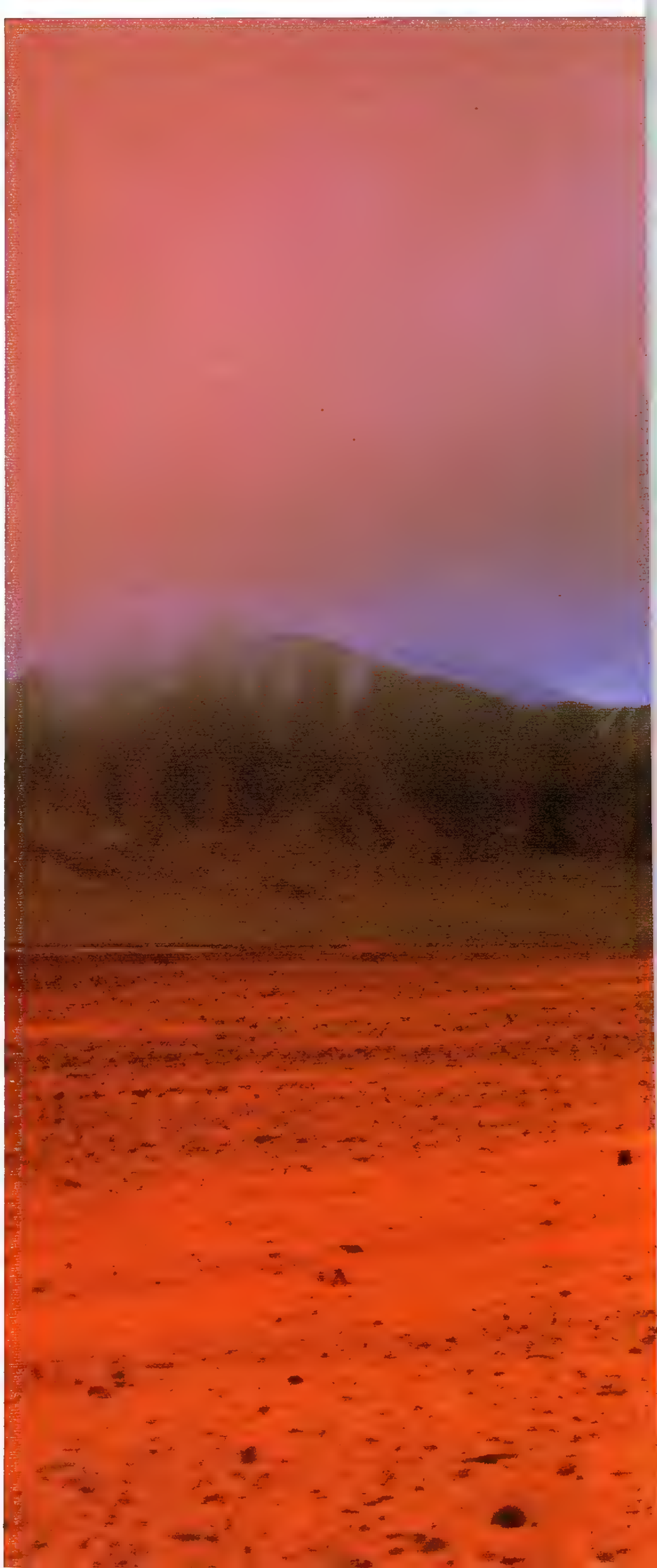
LANDMARK OF XINJIANG

TIANSHAN MOUNTAINS

Cutting across the central part of Xinjiang, the Tianshan Mountains consist of three horizontal ranges known as the North Tianshan Chain, the Middle Tianshan Chain and the South Tianshan Chain. Its snow line begins at around 4,000 metres above sea level. The highest peak, Tomur, rises to an impressive 7,435 metres. Sandwiched between each of its ranges are vast expanses of grasslands, snow-covered peaks, glistening glaciers and dense forests. In June when spring gives way to summer, the grassland gives birth to a dazzling array of flowers. The slopes and valleys show strange land features which are the result of years of sand, wind and water erosion. In the mountains, there are many highland lakes and marshes such as the Tianchi Lake, Sayram Lake, Dalong Lake and Bayanbulak Swan Lake – places which mark some of the region's most enchanting scenic spots.

Four trunk highways lead to the Tianshan Mountains. Perhaps the most convenient route is from Urümqi to Tianchi Lake and continuing to West Baiyang Valley. Along this 90-kilometre route, highland lakes, snow-covered peaks, forests and pasture land come into view. The terrain is harsh and the weather is highly changeable, therefore one is advised to join an organised tour group or hire a vehicle.

Hotels and restaurants are easy to find in the cities along the route. However, once in the mountains it is hard for individual travellers to find dining and accommodation facilities. It is therefore advisable to carry one's own food. During the tourist season from May to September, felt yurts and mobile wooden cabins can be found at Sayram Lake and Narat Grassland providing food and accommodation. In the event that one is unable to find a place to sleep, one can usually stay with the herdsmen's families in their yurts.



1. Sayram, a highland lake, is a sanctuary for swans. (by Chan Yat Nin)
2. The snow peaks of Tianshan Mountains are in contrast with the Gobi desert, but they somehow manage to complement each other. (by Liang Feng)

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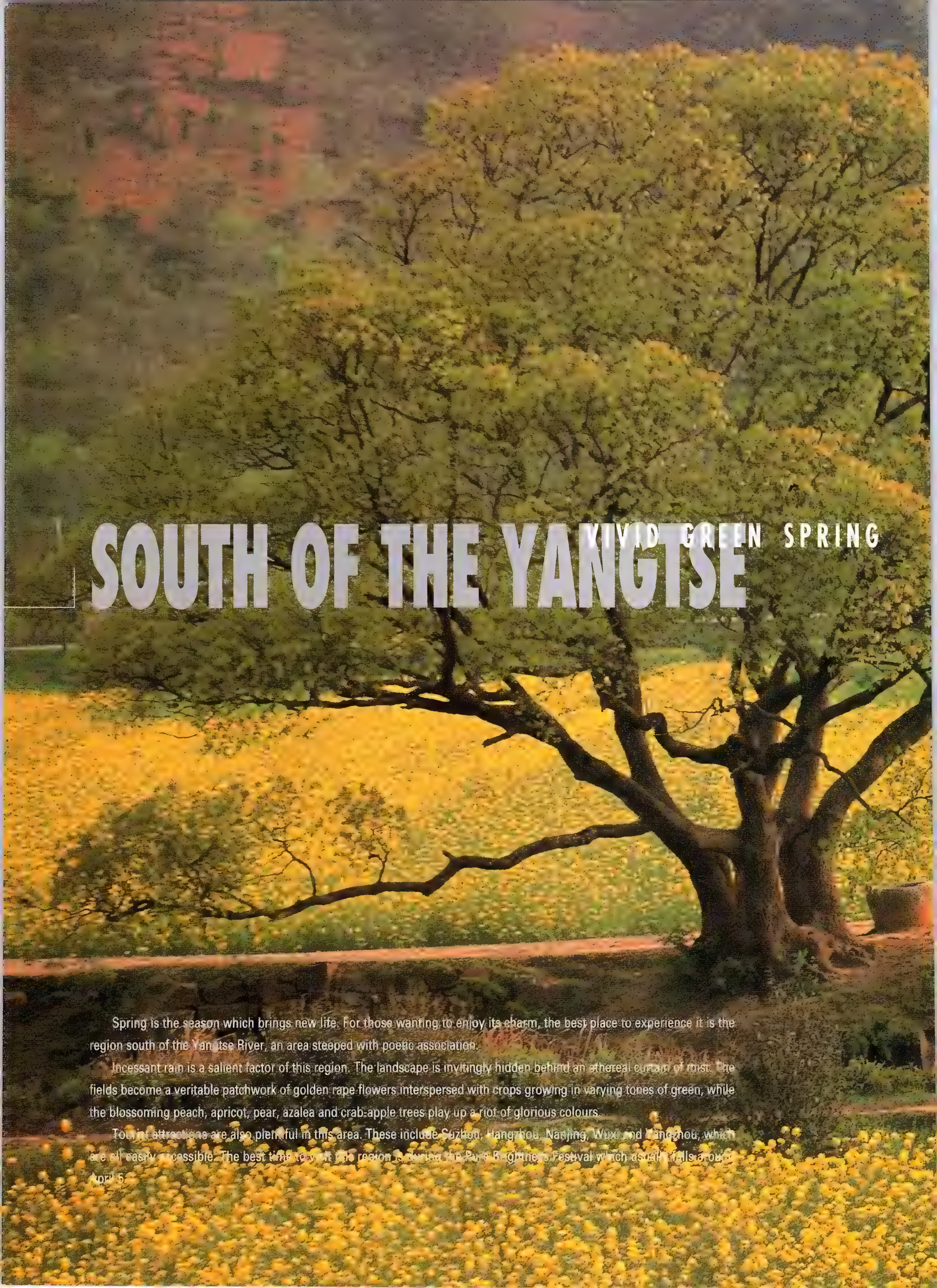


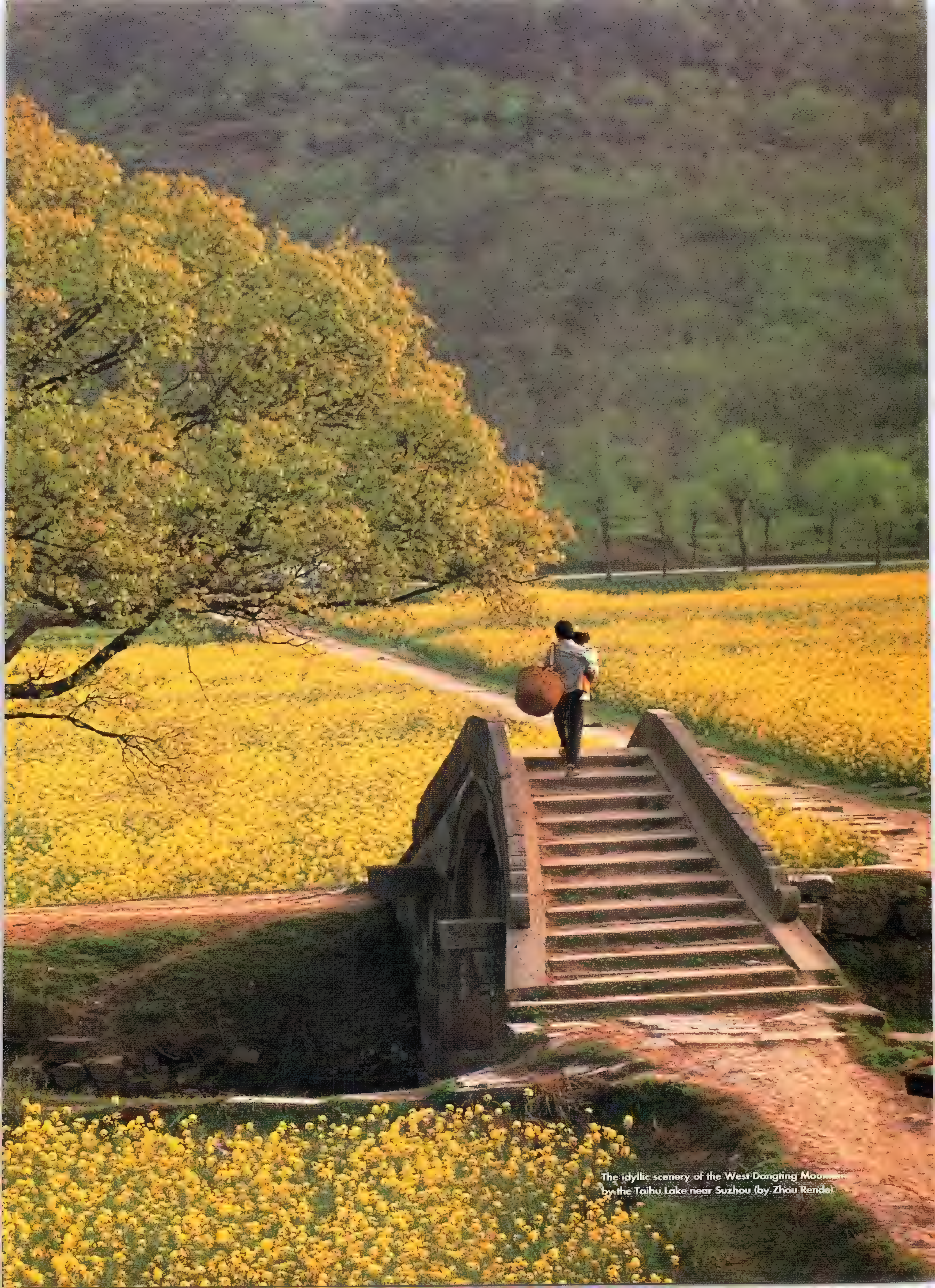
VIVID GREEN SPRING

SOUTH OF THE YANGTSE

Spring is the season which brings new life. For those wanting to enjoy its charm, the best place to experience it is the region south of the Yangtse River, an area steeped with poetic association.

Incessant rain is a salient factor of this region. The landscape is invitingly hidden behind an ethereal curtain of mist. The fields become a veritable patchwork of golden rape flowers interspersed with crops growing in varying tones of green, while the blossoming peach, apricot, pear, azalea and crab-apple trees play up a riot of glorious colours.

Tourist attractions are also plentiful in this area. These include Suzhou, Hangzhou, Nanjing, Wuxi and Yangzhou, which are all easily accessible. The best time to visit this region is during the Pure Brightness Festival which usually falls around April 5.



The idyllic scenery of the West Dongting Mountain by the Taihu Lake near Suzhou (by Zhou Rende)

EJNE BANNER

DESERTS, POPLARS, AND GRASSLAND

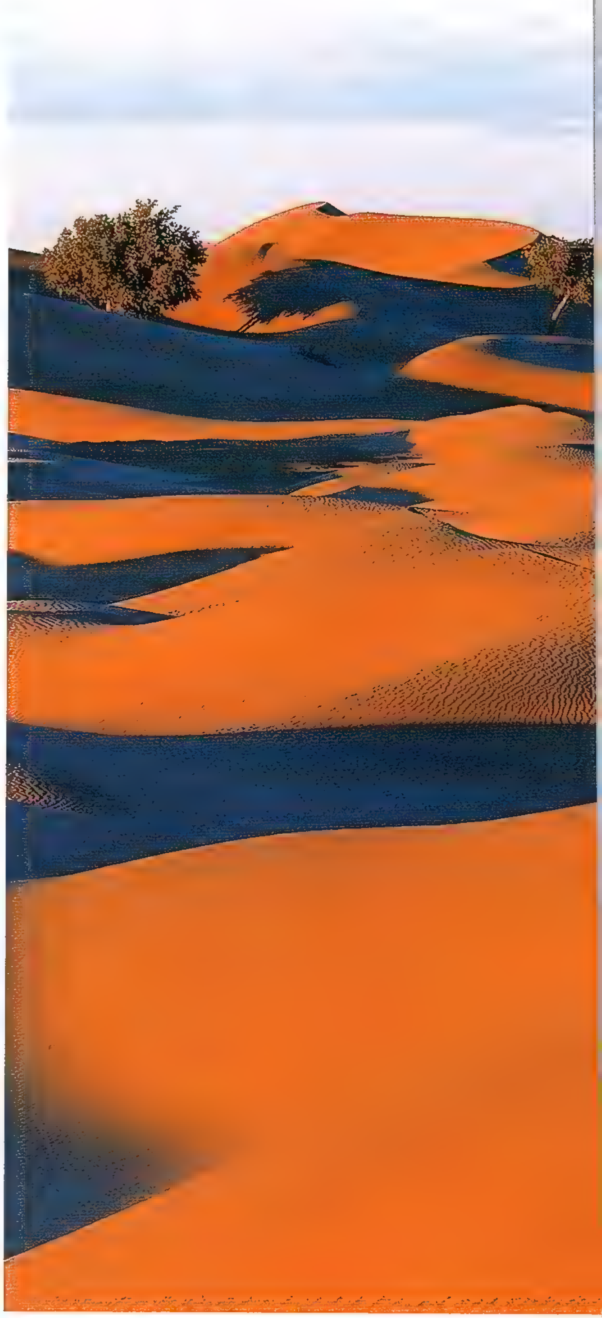
The grassland is the chief tourist attraction in Inner Mongolia, but the vegetation grows thinner and thinner as one travels from east to west. By the time one reaches the Alxa Banner, the landscape is taken over by boundless deserts. In fact, the region of Alxa is known for its three major deserts, the Tenger, Badin Jaron and Ulanb, where camels, known as "Boats of the Desert", roam everywhere.

In contrast, the land in Ejne Banner, close to the Sino-Mongolian border, is covered by vast tracts of diversiform-leaved poplar trees, carpet-like red grassland, and a forest of red willow trees which stretches as far as the eye can see. The landscape becomes magnificent in early October when the poplar trees turn into a golden tapestry.

There are two bus routes leading to the Ejne Banner. One begins from Jiuquan in Gansu Province and runs north through the Badin Jaran Desert; the other begins from Yinchuan, passing Bayanhot, capital of Alxa, stretching north and turning west along the Sino-Mongolian border, ending at Dalaikub, the seat of Ejne Banner. But because these two lines do not operate daily, it is probably more convenient to hire a taxi and a guide in order to visit the desert landscape.

Hotels and restaurants serving typical Mongolian fare can be found in Dalaikub. As the climate in Ejne is rather dry, with a meagre annual precipitation of only 50 mm, it is necessary to bring along lip balm and fruits when visiting the region.

1. Diversiform-leaved poplar trees on the banks of the Ejne River (by Shi Baoxiu)
2. The red grassland on the shores of the Ejne River (by Shi Baoxiu)
3. The boundless Badin Jaron Desert (by Tan Ming)



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LAKE HANAS

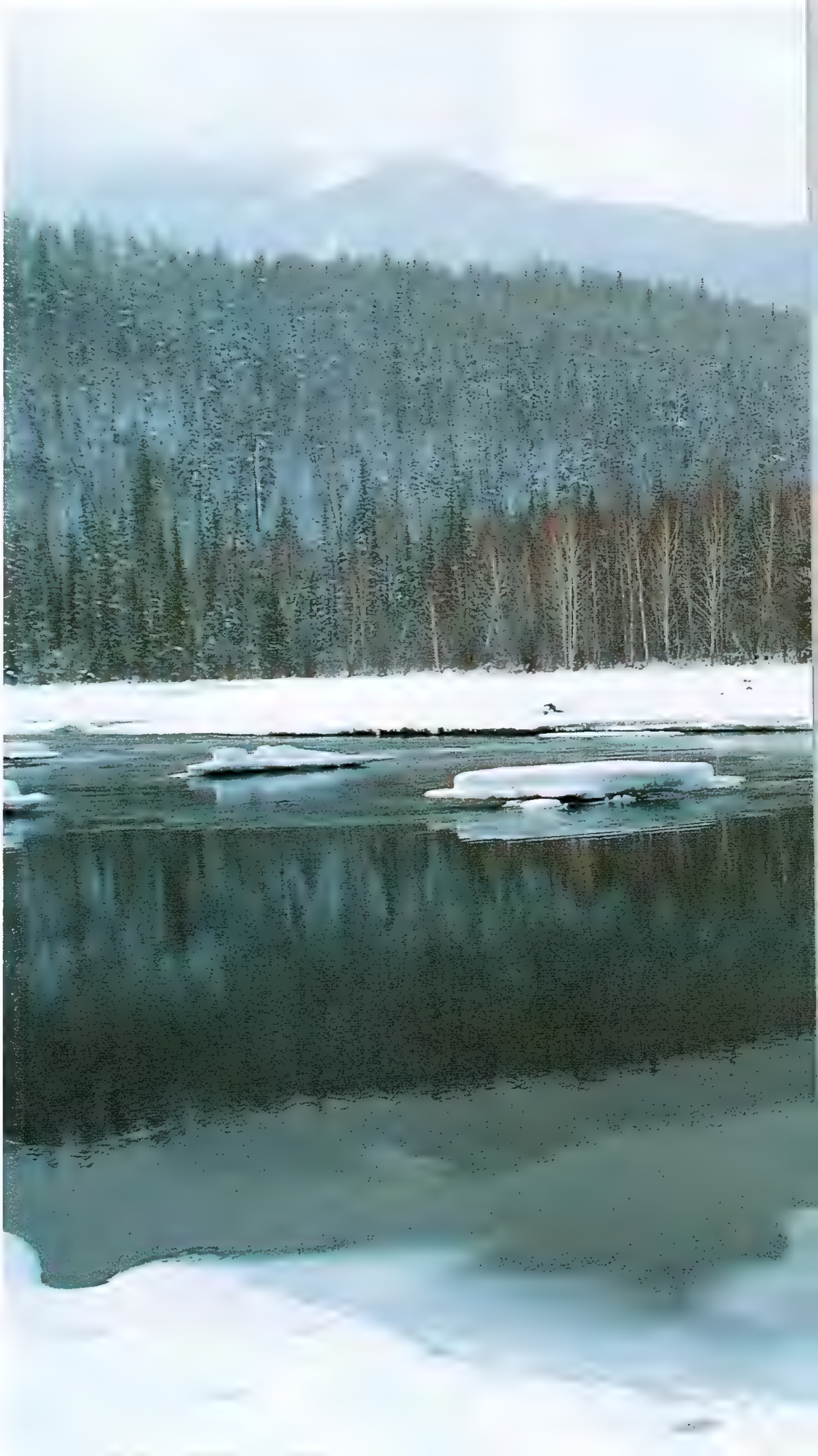
CHANGING SCENES

Lake Hanas, located in the most northern part of Xinjiang, has long been known as a "sapphire in a gold mountain". In fact, the Altay Mountain which holds Lake Hanas does produce gold and sapphires. In the Uygur language, altay means precisely "gold mountain" while Hanas means "mysterious, fertile and beautiful".

Lake Hanas evolved from the ancient Hanas glacier. With an altitude of 1,300 metres above sea level and covering an area of 37.7 square kilometres, the lake is extremely clear and limpid. Moreover, its colour changes with the seasons, as do the mountain forests around the lake: in summer (June and July) the mountain slopes are decked with flowers; in autumn (September), the trees and foliage turn into a carpet of bright reds and yellows; in winter, the slopes are hidden under a blanket of white snow.

To reach Hanas, one can take a bus which takes a whole day; or fly to Altay first, then rent a jeep to Hanas; or go by bus to Kaba or Burqin County, which are the nearest towns to Lake Hanas, and then rent a jeep. Generally speaking, the roads are rugged, however, the road from Kaba County is comparatively better. The distance from Kaba county seat to Lake Hanas is approximately 135 kilometres and takes more than half a day by jeep.

In the tourist season, from June to September, there are reception stations around the lake providing boarding and dining facilities. In Bai Kaba Village, on the way from Kaba County to Lake Hanas there is an army camp which also provides the same services. From October to April the following year, travel services around the lake area are suspended and bus service stops. The only means of getting around is by horse-pulled sleigh. Lake Hanas is a place for people who have a spirit of adventure.



In winter, Hanas is blanketed in snow.
(by Sun Jiabin)

Translated by Fred Huang, Ling Yuan and Li Zhenguo

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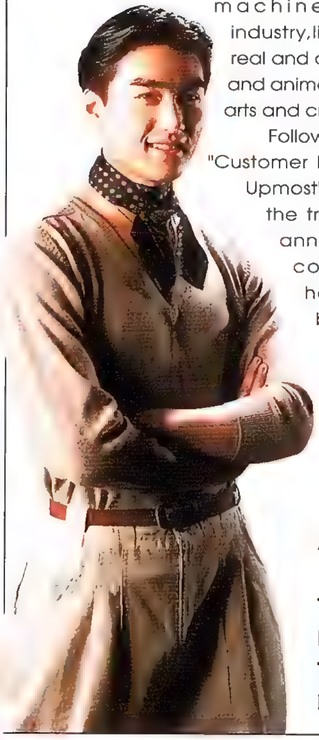

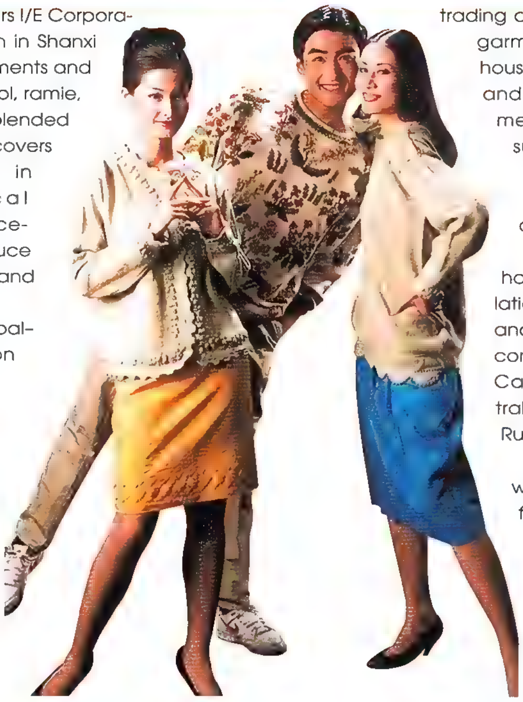

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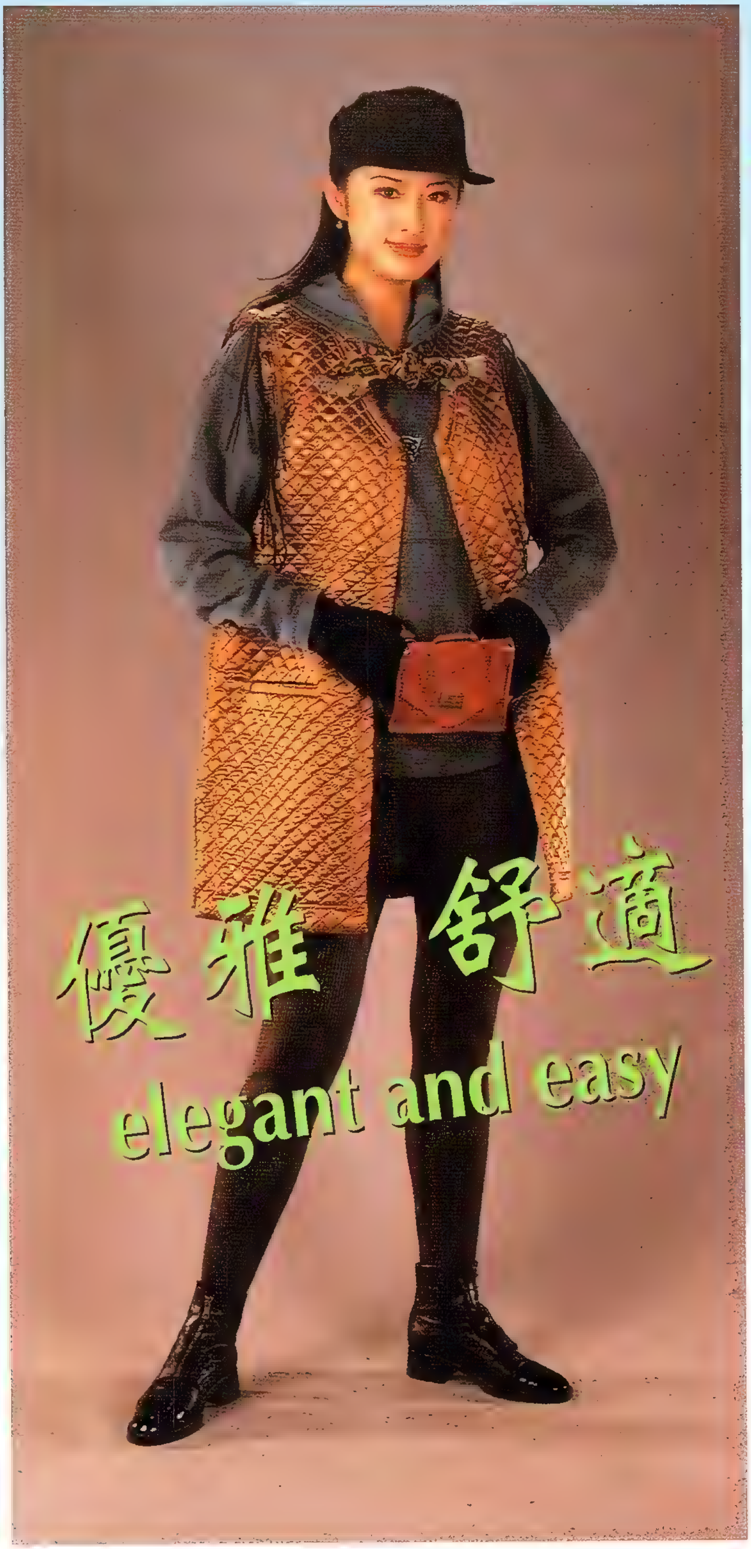

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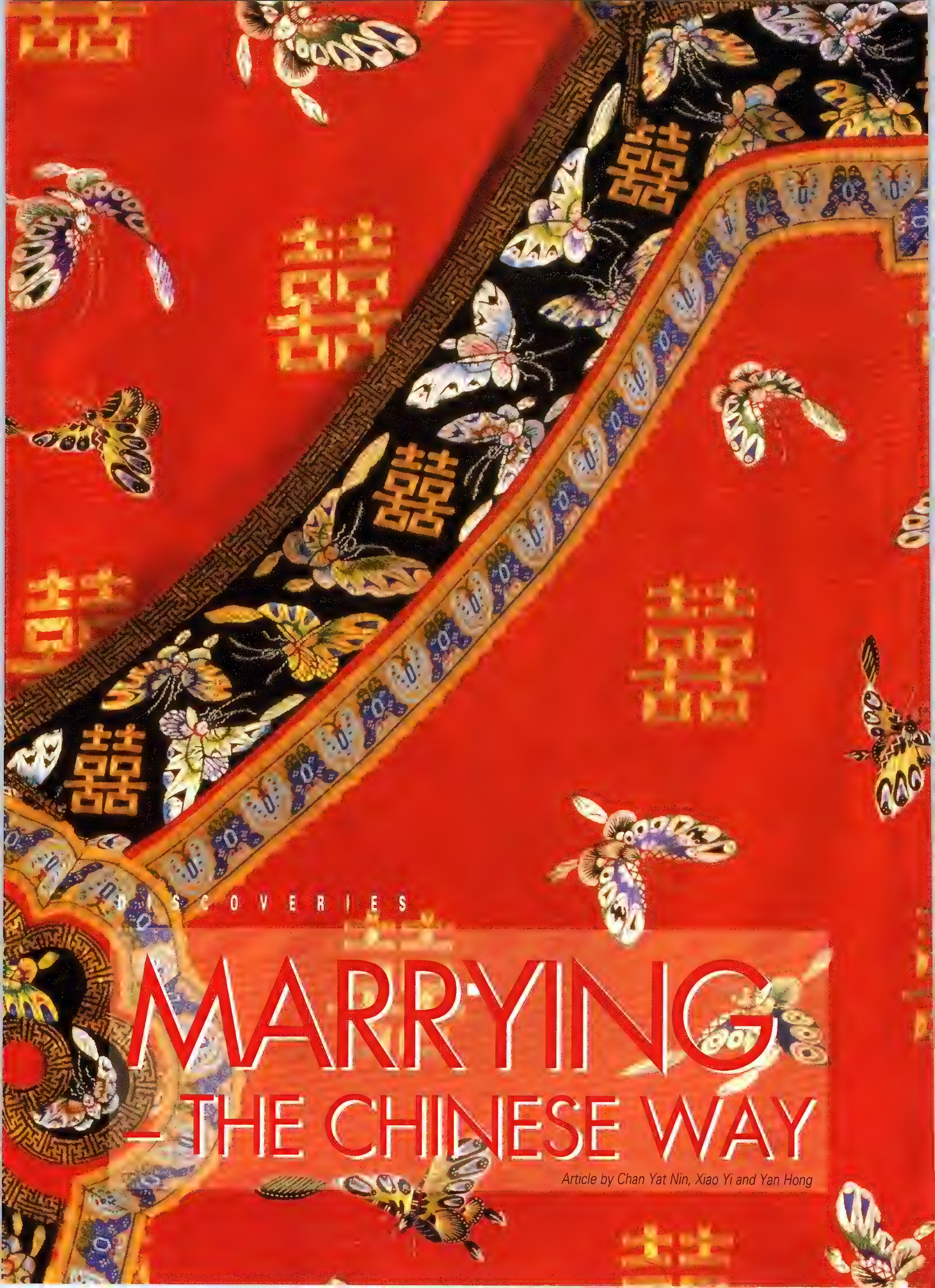


DISCOVERIES

MARRYING – THE CHINESE WAY

Article by Chan Yat Nin, Xiao Yi and Yan Hong

Marriage is a major event in anyone's life, but for the Chinese in particular, it is as important as one's birth or death. Just as the Chinese classic *A Dream of Red Mansions* puts it: "Marriage is a serious business, it's not a matter for joking; after all it is for life."

The *Book of Changes* says, "After the birth of heaven and earth came the multitude of things. The advent of the multitude of things heralded the arrival of man and woman, who in term made the husband-wife relationship possible. From the husband-wife relationship was born the father-son relationship. From the father-son relationship came the relationship between the monarch and his ministers. From the relationship between the monarch and court ministers derived the differences in rank from top to bottom. The difference in ranks gave rise to the system of rites."

This quotation reflects the ancestors' interpretation of the sequence of order and the multitude of things in the world. Obviously the relationship between man and woman, and between husband and wife figure most prominently in the line-up.

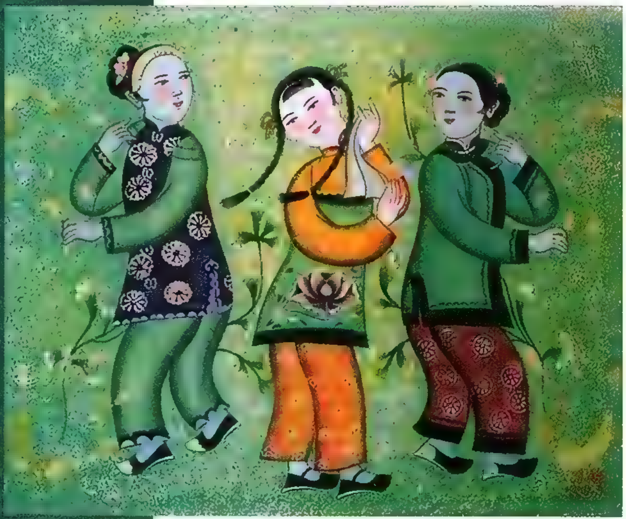
Fu Xi, a legendary figure credited with the invention of hunting, fishing and the domestication of animals, and Nüwa, the goddess creator who patched up holes in the sky with blocks of stone, were believed to be China's first husband and wife team. Legend has it that they tied the knot by presenting each other with a pair of deer skins as a nuptial gift. The age of Fu Xi, which coincided with the twilight years of the primitive society, spelled the end of communal marriages and unveiled monogamy among Chinese ancestors.

The marriage system has since undergone a series of changes. During the Xia and Shang periods, man and woman were already tying the matrimonial knot by holding a wedding ceremony. The foundations of a traditional Chinese marriage were laid down during the Zhou and early Qin periods in the form of the "six rites". Through the metamorphosis of several thousands of years, China has developed a rich assortment of wedding customs and habits.

Traditional Chinese weddings are unique in the world for their multifarious content and elaborate rituals. They guarantee to turn each wedding into an occasion full of solemn discipline and free-wheeling gaiety. Such customs are profound and all-encapsulating reflections of the Chinese people's social mores.

Today, modern society is making inroads into the traditional Chinese wedding customs. We applaud the new concepts and ideals characterised by the freedom of love and marriage, but at the same time we can still heave a sign of relief that exotic traditional marriage customs are alive and kicking in remote areas, preserving a vital part of China's heritage.

A red cloak with the "double-happiness" pattern worn by palace maidens at an emperor's wedding ceremony (by Hu Chui)



Matchmaking, a New Year Picture by Liu Zhumei from Mianzhu, Sichuan Province (by Liu Guangfu)

RURAL WEDDINGS

TRADITION LIVES ON

"Making fun of the bride's parents-in-law" is all part of the wedding celebration. At the wedding ceremony of a farmer's family in Zhengding County, Hebei Province, the parents of the groom are mercilessly teased and made fun of — even their faces are smeared with red make-up. It is believed that this practice will bring good luck and prosperity to the family. Another belief is that it tests the temperament of the parents-in-law to see if they are able to live in harmony with their new daughter-in-law. (by Hao Junchen)

THE MARRIAGE ACCORD

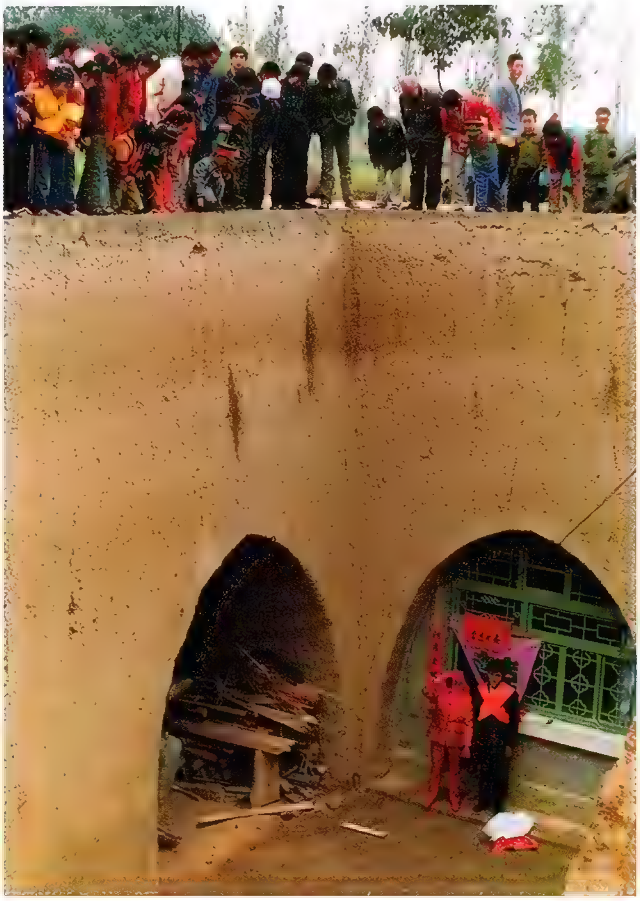
The traditional Chinese marriage consists of two steps: the betrothal and the wedding ceremony. The former indicates that consent has been given for a woman to marry a man; and the latter confirms the matrimonial union which does not begin until the wedding day. In bygone days, it was not necessary for a man and woman to register their marriage with the government; instead, they were accepted by the community as man and wife immediately after the ceremony. The Civil Law of the Republic of China (1912-1949) designated betrothal as the "marriage accord", and consequently, by law or by habit, the promises were usually kept.

The marriage accord was usually made five or more years ahead of the wedding. In some cases, the two families would agree to marry their son and daughter to each other even before the would-be bride and bridegroom were born. In other cases, the girl was adopted to her future husband's family when she was only a baby.

The eligible age for marrying has changed over time. During the Zhou Dynasty (c.11th Century-221 B.C.) a man was not allowed to marry until he had turned 30, and a woman was ready to marry at 20. Marrying at a young age became vogue during the Han and Tang dynasties, when women were allowed to marry at the tender age of 15 or, on some occasions, even 13. After the Song Dynasty, the marrying age became 16 for a man and 14 for a woman. Though in most cases the man was always older than the woman, there were exceptions, particularly in agricultural societies, where often a young girl was taken into the family as a bride-to-be to take care of the boy who was younger than she and help with the family chores.

By tradition there are a host of taboos forbidding marriage. For instance, marriage was banned between a man and woman sharing the same family name, or if they belonged to different generations of the same family. An official was not allowed to marry a commoner; a nobleman was not supposed to marry a woman of a lowly background. Marriage of Buddhists and Taoists was forbidden, as was anyone who was in mourning for their parents.

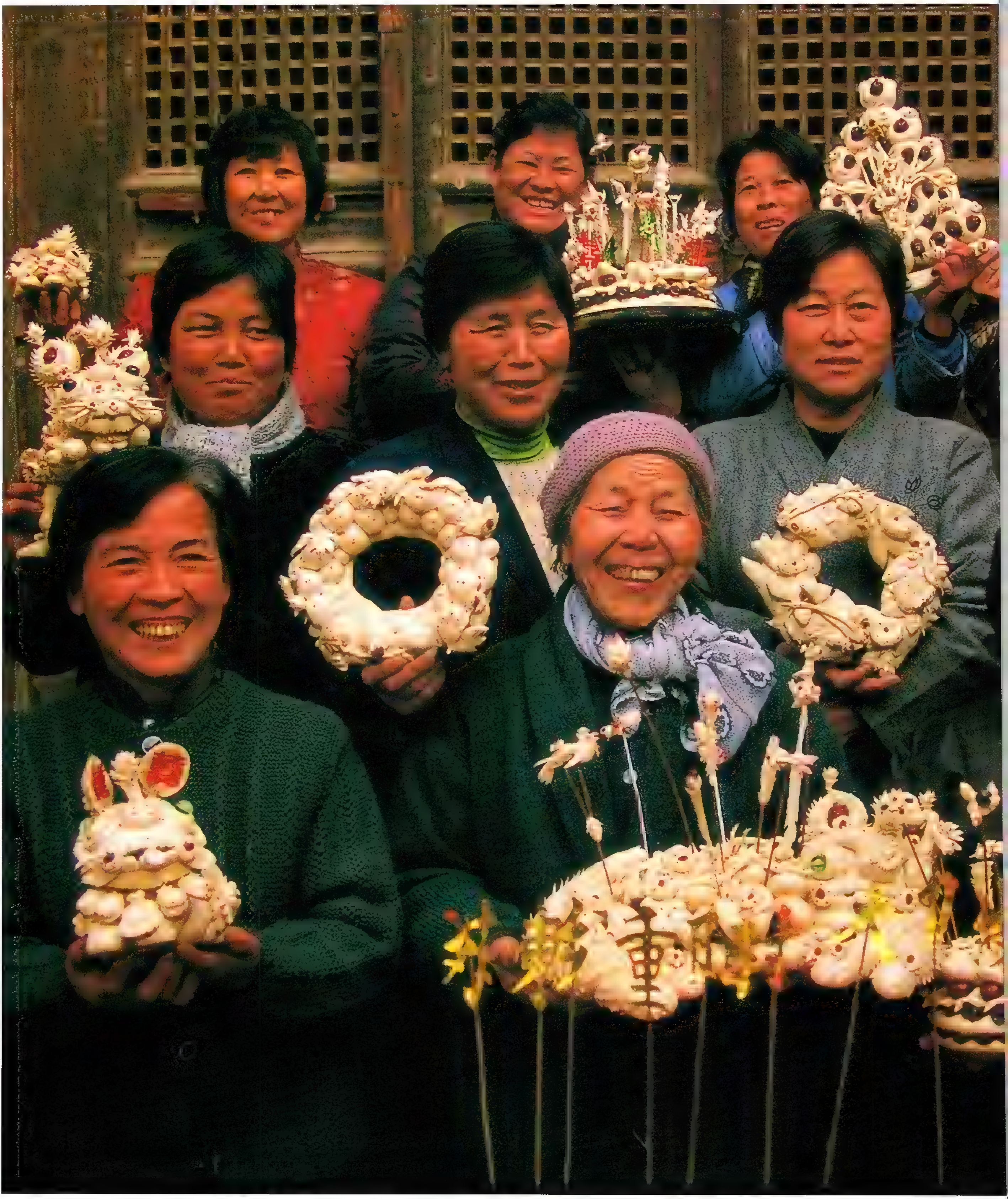
In olden times, parents decided who their children would marry, with the father having more say in the matter than the mother. Matchmaking also played an important role. Most matchmakers were married women and because they earned their living by uniting people in marriage, the result often had mixed outcomes. They would often exaggerate the eligibility of both sides by telling the bride's parents that the man was rather rich and at the same time telling the man's family that the intended bride had good looks. Hence the saying, "No marriage is possible without a matchmaker, but one has to take the word of a matchmaker with a pinch of salt."



On the loess plateau by the banks of the Yellow River, there is a kind of underground cave dwelling called a "cellar courtyard", which resembles a "square well". Chambers are dug into the four walls surrounding the well. A bridal chamber converted from such a cave dwelling is literally called dongfang (cave chamber), which is probably the origin of the Chinese word for bridal chamber. In this picture, the newly-wedded couple stand in front of their bridal chamber to accept congratulations. (by Hu Guoqing)

In Lingshi County, Shanxi Province, a young couple get married at the Fenxi Coal Mining Administration. The photograph shows the bride and bridegroom bowing to their parents. Comically dressed, the bridegroom's parents will later be subjected to taunting and teasing by relatives and friends. (by Wang Liangzhi)

People living on the loess plateau m
often than not, use donkeys instead
sedan chairs to fetch their brides. Usua
the bride covers herself with a large pi
of red silk or cloth from head to foot, wh
performs two functions: the first is to m
her shyness, the second is to make
donkey look more like a "walking sec
chair". In the case of this farmer's famil
Huachi County, Gansu Province, the you
bride leaves her parents' home to
accompaniment to some beautiful suc
music in expression of her appreciatio
her parents for bringing her up and
good wishes for them. (by Wei Fengzhe



In the rural areas of Shaanxi Province, the most often seen mascot at a wedding is flowery steamed bread. Villagers work the dough into a variety of forms, such as baby-delivering unicorn, chubby baby and fish which symbolise prosperity. Given to the wedding couple, they are used to express the villagers' fond wishes. (by Yu Zhixin)

Farming families pay heed to both auspicious symbolism and practicality when preparing a dowry. This pair of long-hair rabbits not only embodies the parents' good wishes for the new couple but also indicates their support for the young to develop a sideline family business of raising rabbits. (by Lu Guang)

In Shaanxi Province, when a farming family holds a wedding, it places the labels of all the gifts received from relatives, friends and neighbours on the door, seemingly using them as decoration. The variety of colourful gifts indicates that the family enjoys great popularity. In this picture people helping with the wedding ceremony all wear red tags indicating their respective duties. (by Yu Zhixin)

People living in the Xihaigu mountainous region in southern Ningxia have, for centuries, followed the tradition of bringing the bride to the groom's home on a donkey. On the day of the wedding, the bride wears her wedding outfit and a bright red scarf. After bidding farewell to her loved ones, she is carried to the donkey by one of her elder brothers. (by Wei Xianzheng)

In the rural areas of Longdong Prefecture, Gansu Province, the wedding ceremony is an extremely grand occasion. When the bride and groom enter their bridal chamber, after having performed all the rituals, the master of ceremonies carries a *sheng*, an ancient measuring cup, to scatter seeds and walnuts over the new couple. Moreover, the bride has to make noodles in front of the guests to demonstrate her cooking skills. Occasionally, someone will hide a chopstick in the flattened dough to play a trick on her. (by Sun Jianzhong)

THE SIX RITUALS

The six rituals which cement a wedding are always taken seriously.

First, the presentation of gifts. When a woman's family has accepted a proposal made through the a matchmaker, the man's family delivers a gift to the woman's family.

Second, matching the couple's name and birth charts. After the gift has been delivered, the two sides exchange the couple's names, ages and birth dates, together with information on the family's background. A fortune-teller then compares the couple's Eight Characters which indicate the year, month, day and hour of the couple to see if they are compatible with each other.

Third, the engagement. If the couple's Eight Characters are found to be compatible, the man's side entrusts the matchmaker to notify the woman's family and negotiate the conditions for wedlock. A preliminary trousseau, which includes a gold hairpin, a ring and a pair of ear-rings is presented while the woman's family gives some gifts in return.

Fourth, after a couple has thus become engaged, the man's side presents what is known as the "official trousseau", which includes a betrothal certificate, money and jewellery. Only then is the betrothal confirmed.

Fifth, setting a favourable date for the wedding. The family of the bridegroom-to-be consults a fortune-teller again before notifying the bride's family of the auspicious date for the wedding. The date may also be decided through consultation between the two families.

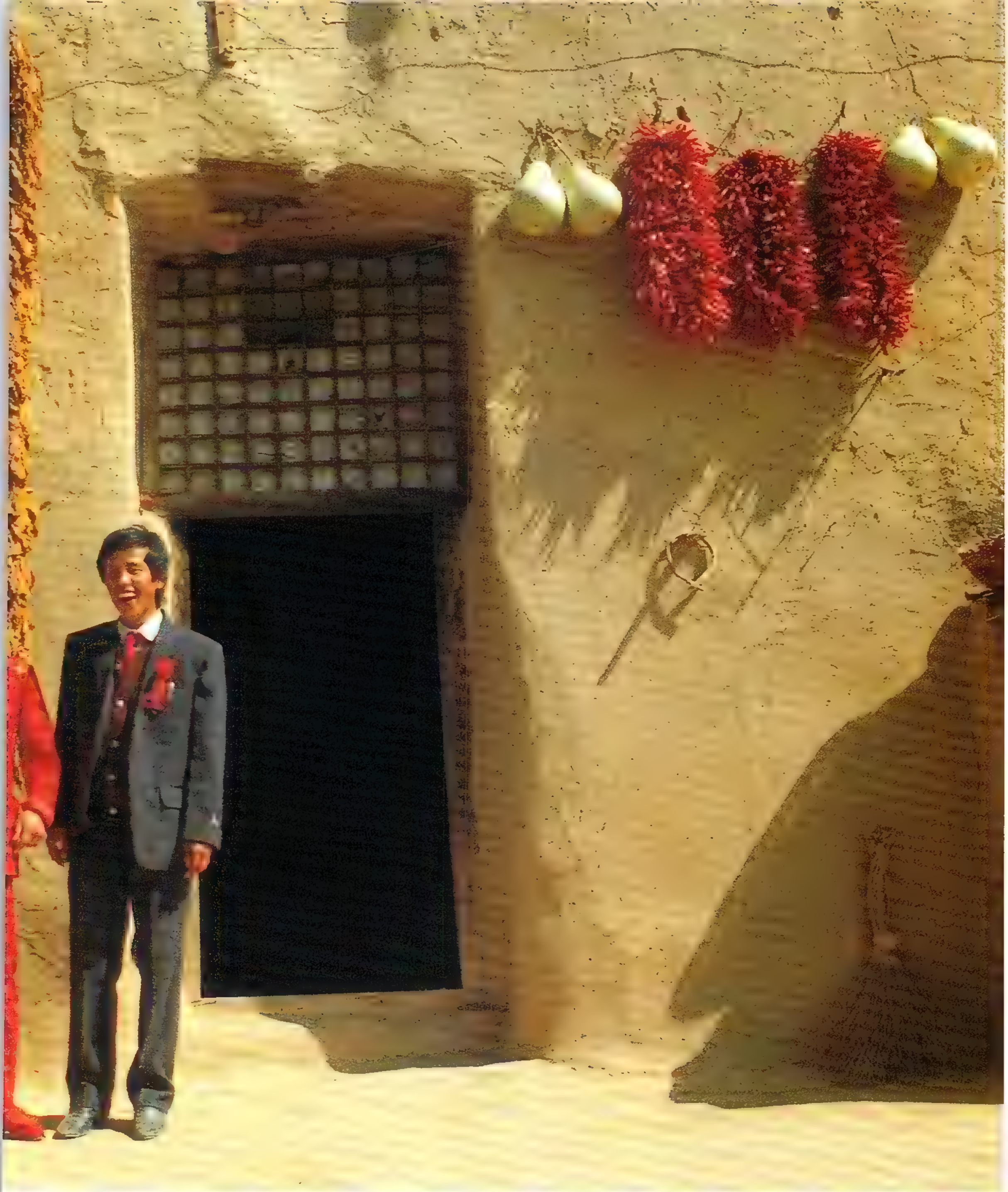
Sixth, escorting the bride to her bridal chamber. The bridegroom, obeying the order of his parents, goes to the home of his bride to fetch her to her new home where they will live.

The bride's departure from her parental home also marks the beginning of the wedding ceremony.

This group of photographs are of a bride's welcoming procession. On the route, firecrackers are set off every now and then to liven up the atmosphere. It is also believed that the sound of the firecrackers can ward off evil spirits. (by Qin Junxiao)

At one time drums and gongs were indispensable instruments at a wedding ceremony in northern China. Nowadays, the musicians do not necessarily confine themselves to the traditional Chinese musical instruments. This picture shows the simply clad native villagers in Shanxi playing Western brass instruments. (by Qin Junxiao)

The wedding feast, of course, should be sumptuous. For an entire day all family members, friends and neighbours make thei contribution to the preparations. Normally nine courses are served at the wedding banquet because the number nine, jiu, is a homonym of "long". (by Qin Junxiao)



After the wedding ceremony, the newlyweds return to the bride's home for a three-day visit, which also signifies the end of the ceremony. Thereafter, the new bride starts farming in her new home. This photograph shows a new couple on the first day before they set off for work. (by Hei Ming)

ellow villagers who have been invited to the vedding feast do not eat for free. In order to xpress their congratulations and alleviate the amily's financial burden, they shower the vedding couple with all kinds of gifts, or by jiving cash. (by Qin Junxiao)

The groom, pushing the bike which he is sending to his bride, has had his face smeared by his friends to make him look ridiculons. Yet, it is important for him not to show any irritation nor must he lose his temper lest he lose his reputation for being an even-tempered, loving husband. (by Qin Junxiao)

THE WEDDING CEREMONY

The wedding ceremony, consists of taking the bride home, the ceremonic ritual, the banquet and *charivari* in the bridal chamber.

Once the wedding date has been set, the couple's families embark on a hectic schedule of preparations. The bride will have her facial hair removed and make her hair ready for the fastidious coiffure. Her family arranges a feast in her honour, while the family of the bridegroom gets is busy arranging the bridal chamber and making preparations for the wedding ceremony and the banquet.

On the day, the bridegroom puts on his best clothes before setting out to pick up his bride. A sedan chair is indispensable to his procession, which also consists of a band of drum and *suona* players. After the groom has kowtowed to his parents-in-law, the bride approaches her parents. Her father admonishes her to be a diligent and virtuous wife and listen to her husband, mother-in-law and her husband's brothers and sisters; and her mother tells her to observe the virtues of morality, proper speech, modest manner and diligent work.

As she mounts the sedan chair the bride must cry beseechingly to show her reluctance to leave her parents. A woman in the bride's entourage then flashes a mirror or lamp inside the sedan chair to exorcise any evil spirits that might be hiding there.

When the sedan chair is lifted off the ground, the bride's family pour a basin of water onto the ground in front of the door. In fact, the water symbolises the parents' wish that their daughter will get on well with her husband's family so that she will not be divorced and turned back to her parents' house.

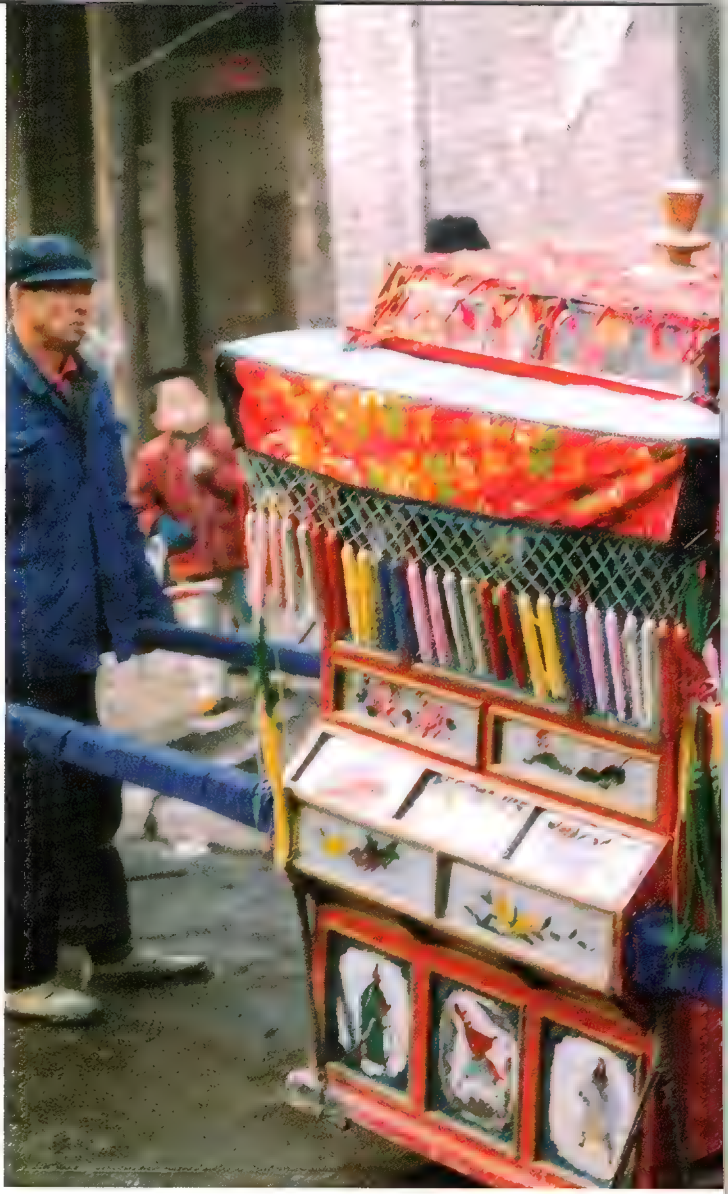
As the bridal procession goes on its way, firecrackers are set off, and the band keeps beating the drums and tooting the suona horn.

As soon as sedan chair arrives at the new home, the newlyweds are mobbed by neighbours all vying to receive some small change given out by the couple as a symbol of good luck. The bride's face is kept hidden with a red scarf while her husband or brother-in-law lifts her out of the sedan chair. All the while the matchmaker holds an umbrella above her head, and the bride finds herself walking towards her new home on a felt carpet or straw matting, for both earth and heaven are too sacred for her to touch at that particular moment.

Before entering the house, the bride is asked to step over a horse saddle, which is a symbol of safety, or a brazier, whose fire is believed to be able to dispel evil.

After the couple have bowed to heaven and earth, to their parents and to each other, the bride and groom enter the bridal chamber, where the groom is allowed to lift his bride's veil and the two of them sit facing each other on the bed. All the while family members and friends toss coins, peanuts and lotus seeds at them, symbolising the wish that the couple will have lots of sons.

Then comes the moment for the groom to present a tendril of his hair to his bride, who then ties it with a lock of her own hair. Hence the traditional Chinese saying, "husband and wife with hair tied together".

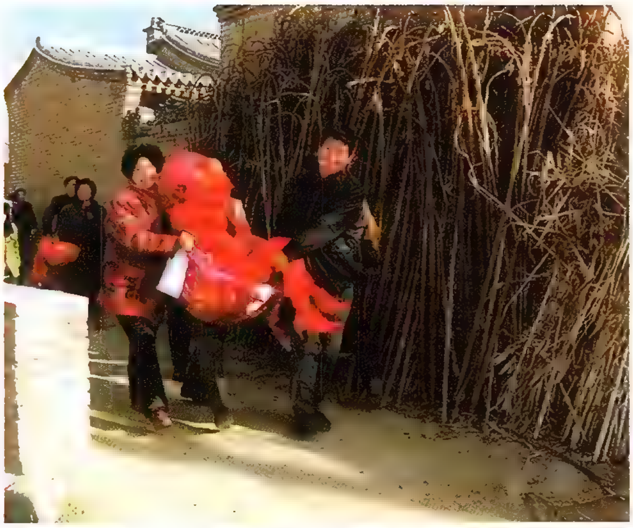


This is a photograph of a wedding ceremony in a farming family in Pingyao County Shanxi Province. The locality has a long standing tradition of fetching the bride in sedan chair. When the day arrives, the bride gets up early and washes her face thre times and then dress up in her bridal costume. She is then carried to the sedan chai by her elder brother. (by Li Genlai)

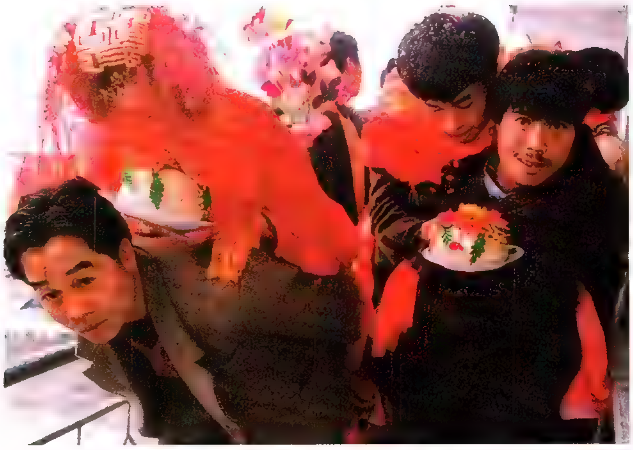
The groom may then leave the bridal chamber to accept the congratulations from family members and friends and host the wedding banquet. Meanwhile, the bride is left alone on her bridal bed, which is called "sitting the net".

In ancient times, before the wedding banquet was given, a gourd would be split in two and linked with thread. The bride and groom would each hold one half of the gourd and drink the wine contained in it. The message of this was that from that day on, as separate beings, the bride and groom had been joined in wedlock. In later years, the gourd was replaced with gourd-shaped wine cups. Today, the bride and groom are simply required to drink a cup of wine with arms entwined. The ritual whereby the bride has to remain inside her bridal chamber has also long been abolished so that she can now join her groom at the wedding feast.

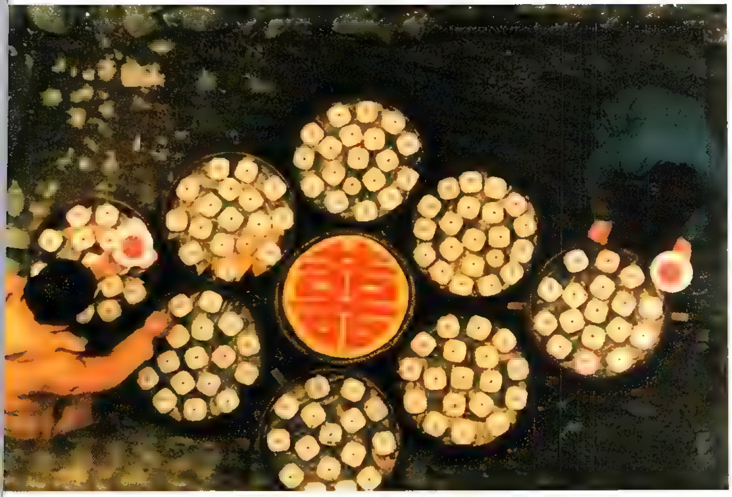
Charivari is the most raucous part of the entire wedding ceremony. The idea is to test the bride's patience. She has to put up with all sorts of dirty tricks and outrageous flirtations.



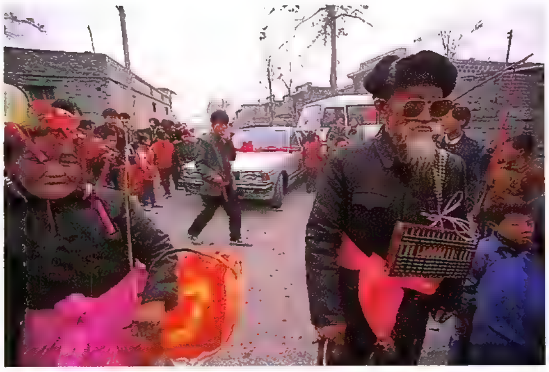
The bridegroom in Dalegou Village, Shanxi Province, is carrying his bride wrapped in a bright red quilt onto the bridal cart. It is thought that this practice may have derived from the ancient belief that a bride should not touch the ground when leaving her maiden home lest she should offend the gods of heaven and earth. (by Zhao Weidong)



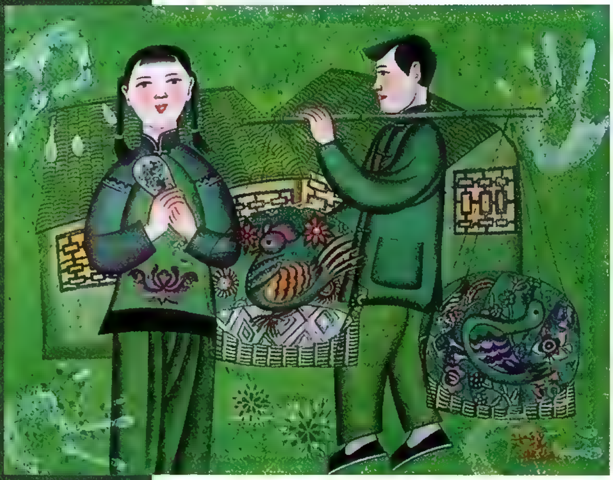
This wedding ceremony has a strong native flavour. The bride and groom, each carrying a flowery steamed bun weighing a quarter of a kilo, are being carried pigged-back into the bridal chamber. One of the buns contains coins, symbolising good fortune, while the other has Chinese dates inside, representing the wish for an eminent son. Over the next three days, the couple has to eat both buns, eating half each. (by Wei Fengzheng)



This photograph shows eight steamers filled with cakes surrounding a cake with the Chinese character "double happiness". In total, they make nine, or jiu, meaning "long" or "lasting". It is a custom in rural Zhejiang that guests coming to the wedding are treated with this kind of cakes.



At the wedding ceremony of this farmer's family in Shaanxi Province, even the bride's new grand parents-in-law are given a clownish look. In fact, the items heaped on them embody everyone's fond wishes for the family: the abacus represents the wish for smart budgeting in future life; the red bag hung on the bamboo rod embodies the wish of being able to amass a fortune; the firecrackers on top of their heads serves to drive off evil spirits.... (by Yu Zhixin)



Becoming betrothed

MODERN WEDDINGS

THE CONTINUATION OF TRADITION

Under the escort of his friends, a young man living in Wujianlou Village, Fengtai District, Beijing, leads his bride home. The ritual of tricking the wedding couple is mixed in with the whole procession. A mischievous youngster throws firecrackers in their path – one of them makes a "direct hit" on the bride. Amidst the sound of firecrackers and laughter, the newly wedded break away from the crowd and run home. (by Li Zhiguo)

VICISSITUDES OF THE LAST FEW DECADES

During the first half of the 20th Century, Western wedding rituals gradually found their way into China, and it was not uncommon to see a bride in a wedding gown and the groom in a Western suit.

In the days when thrift was the order of the day, weddings were simplified — from the 1950s to the 1970s, Chinese newlyweds often wore simple blue uniforms, some simply with a red flower pinned to the chest. At that time, even wedding photographs became a rarity on Chinese bedroom walls. After having their marriage registered at the neighbourhood or township police station, the couple returned to their home with a wedding certificate in hand. Usually they handed out a few dollars' worth of candy to announce the legality of their marriage.

Those days have long since passed. As if in the blink of an eyelid, it has become popular, since the 1980s, for couples to hold their wedding banquet in a restaurant. A cluster of tables are laid out, the one in the centre conspicuously holding a wedding cake decorated with blazing candles as well as dragon and phoenix patterns.

In cities, wedding feasts are often arranged during the holidays so that it is convenient for relatives and friends to attend the celebrations. Generally speaking, a groom arrives at the home of his bride's family in a car at nine or ten in the morning to pick up his beautifully dressed bride, who usually hires a professional to help with her hair and make-up. With borrowed or rented cars, the groom must also arrange to pick up his parents-in-law and her other relatives. It is the custom that the bride's family invites as many guests as possible to show that the girl is well-supported by her family and relatives, therefore, the groom and his family must treat her well.

While most grooms prefer to use a car to fetch their brides, some prefer to choose rickshaws to pick up their brides.

Congratulatory Karaoke Singing

A couple's wedding is often presided over by their best friends, however, some couples go to the extra expense of hiring a Master of Ceremonies from a wedding company. The role of the MC is to observe all the established rituals of a wedding, improvising when necessary and keeping the guests amused.

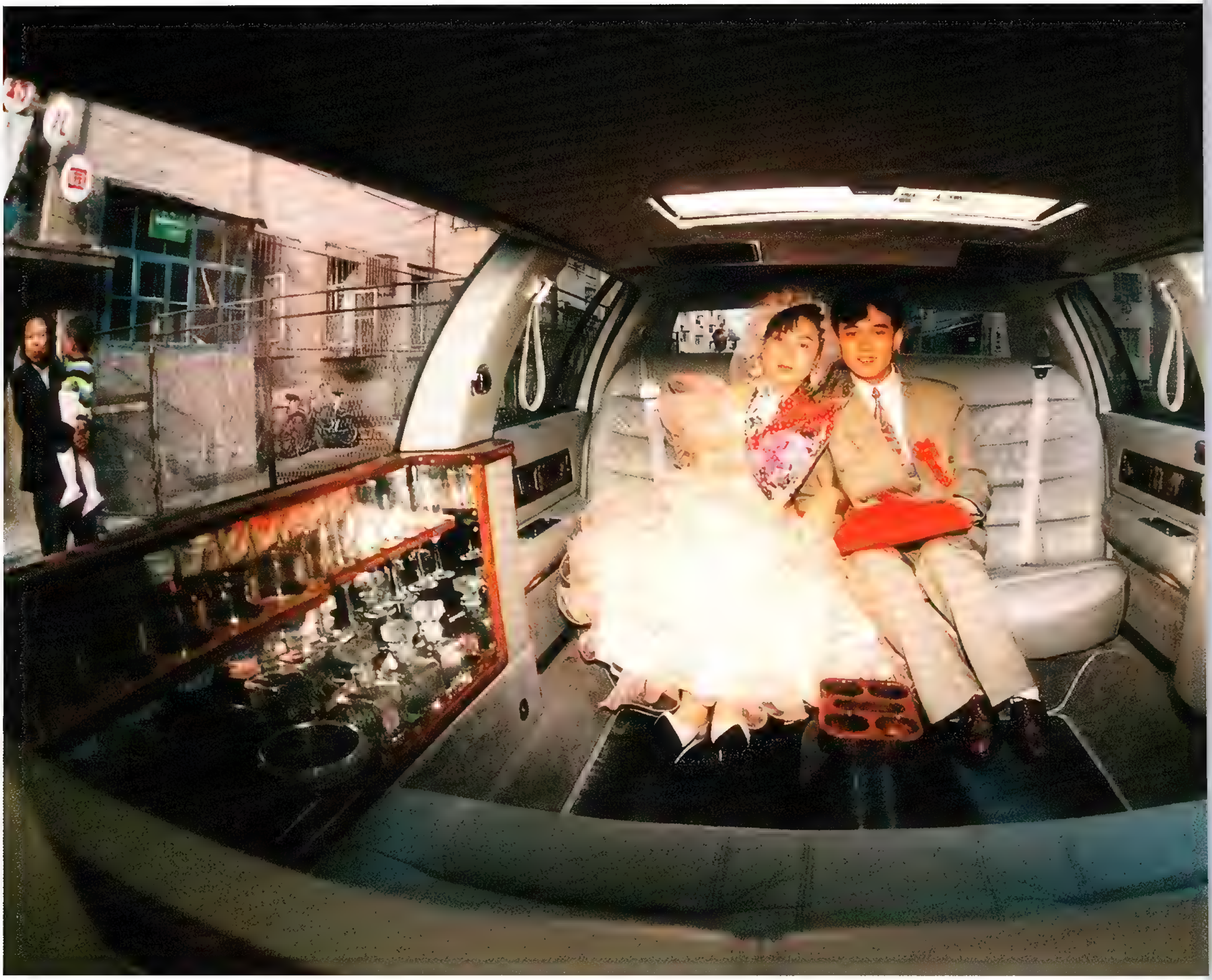
As the wedding banquet commences, all the well-wishers stand up to hear the citation of the wedding certificate. Then, the bride and groom bow three times to the crowd as if to heaven and earth, then three times to their parents and lastly three times to each other, to the warm applause of the guests. Thus a new family is born.

But not all newlyweds are let off so lightly at their wedding banquet. A cunning Master of Ceremonies will entertain the guests by pestering the groom with a series of questions about how he had managed to capture the heart of his bride. Then he would ask the couple to play a series of games such as eating an apple dangling tentatively between their faces.

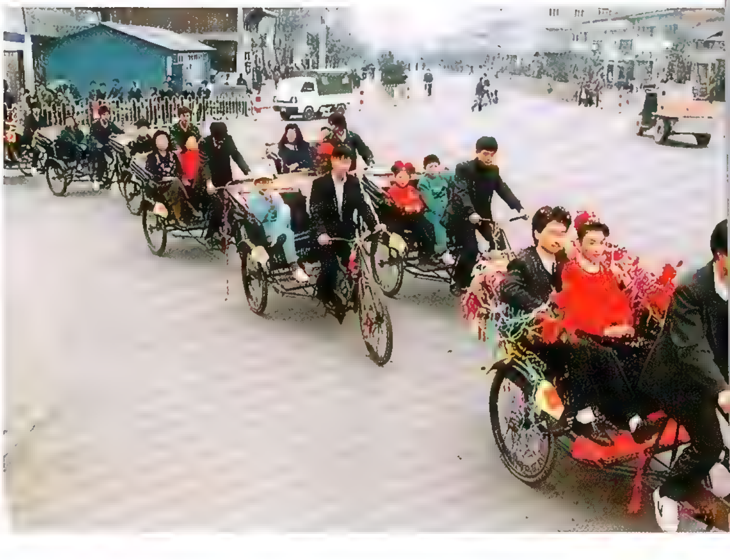
In the past the bridal chamber was the only place for carrying out the mischievous *charivari* during a wedding. Today, the focus of *charivari* has shifted to the wedding party. This, however, does not mean that all is quiet in the bridal chamber. In rural areas the traditional *charivari* is still very much alive, though it is generally becoming rarer in urban areas.

After the meal, well-wishers can step onto the podium to sing songs to the accompaniment of a karaoke machine or dance with the music.

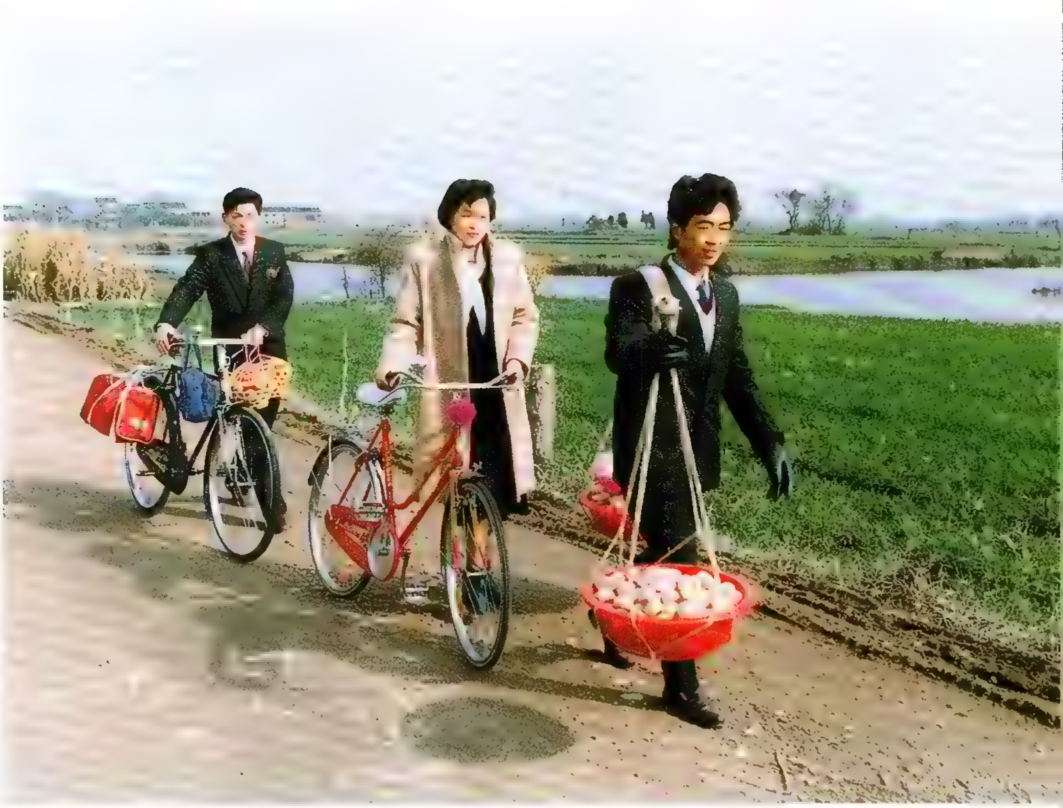
The wedding custom in a compact community of Hakkas in Maling Village, Guangdong Province, is highly unique. When a young couple get married the bride and bridegroom circle the village nine times accompanied by a bridesmaid carrying an umbrella. After that, they walk once around the ancestral hall to show their respect for their forebears. While doing so, an elderly woman following the couple raises a bucket filled with cypress leaves, rice and chopsticks over their heads to symbolise the wish that they "live in peace and harmony" and that they "give birth to an eminent son very soon". (by Li Yongxiong)



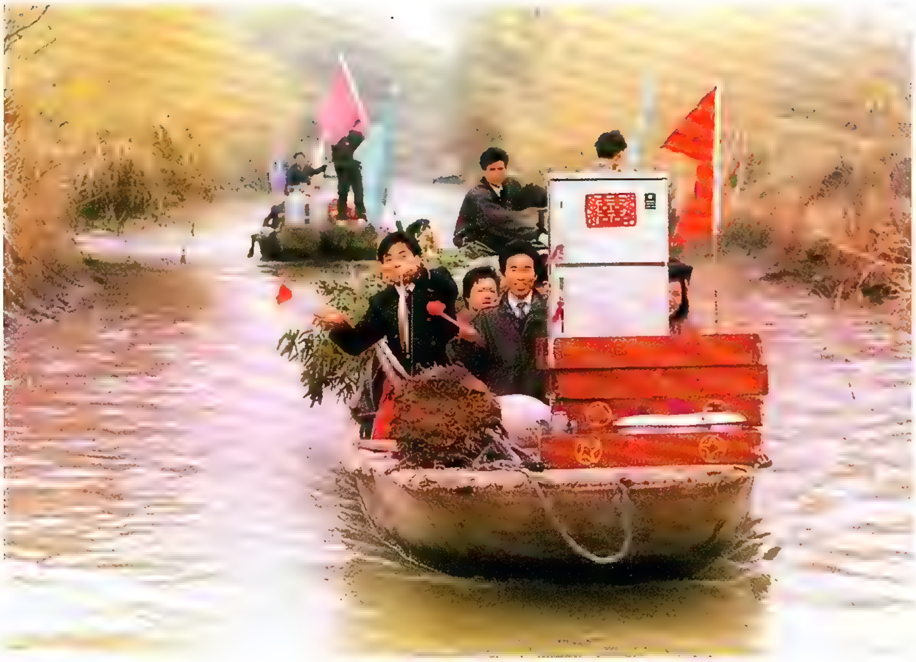
Fetching the bride in a deluxe limousine or coach has become the most fashionable way for young couples living in urban areas to begin their wedding ceremony. This photograph is taken in Anshan City, Liaoning Province. (by Wei Liequn)



Any type of vehicle can be used to represent the "bridal sedan chair", depending on choice or the family's budget. The picture shows the wedding procession of a young couple in Emeishan City, Sichuan Province – all the relatives and friends accompanying the bride to her new home ride in pedicabs. Zhang Guowen, the bridegroom, is in fact a driver. (by Yu Guangliu)



The tradition that the bride should return to the house of her parents with her husband on the day following her wedding still remains in many areas. This young couple in Mahangqiao, Jiangsu Province, are led back to the house by the bride's younger brother, who carries a shoulder pole laden with gifts for her family.(by Wang Boxing)



Boarding a colourfully decorated boat, the bride in Hongqiao Village, Zhejiang Province, sails to her new home, accompanied by her relatives and carrying her dowry. (by Xu Jianrong)

In recent years, the young people living in Qingdao have come to enjoy the novelty and romance of holding their wedding ceremony on a beach by the sea. It is their belief that holding the ceremony here best expresses their "solemn pledge of love". Almost all of them hire a professional to record the occasion on video. For some, the ceremony is extremely extravagant – with bridesmaids, best men, page boys, directors and even pet animals joining in! (by Li Nan)

In the past, tricks were mainly directed towards the bride but nowadays the groom is often equally teased. This bridegroom in Jixing Township, Sichuan Province, is answering questions from his bride with a cooking pot lid hung around his neck; he must answer each time his bride hits the lid. (by Gao Zhihua)

Nowadays, people devise more and more tricks to tease the newlyweds on their wedding day. At the wedding ceremony for this young couple of workers in Luzhou, Sichuan Province, the bride and groom are forced to dance on their bed. Those who come to make fun of them are mainly young co-workers at the factory. (by Wang Qi)

DWINDLING FAMILY SIZE

In China, the age of 18 marks the end of adolescence. However, for the Chinese family, parental support for their children lasts at least until they are married. Unmarried children often stay with their parents who continue to provide for them even if they are already working and earning money. Some children give all their earnings to their parents , but more often than not the parents save the money for the day when their children get married. Statistics show that each newly-wedded couple needs 30,000-40,000 yuan to set up home and buy the essential household appliances and furniture. A son who cannot afford to pay for these things himself can often rely on his parents for financial help. In many cases, the bride and groom pool their savings to "build" their new home, making it as modern and as cosy as possible.

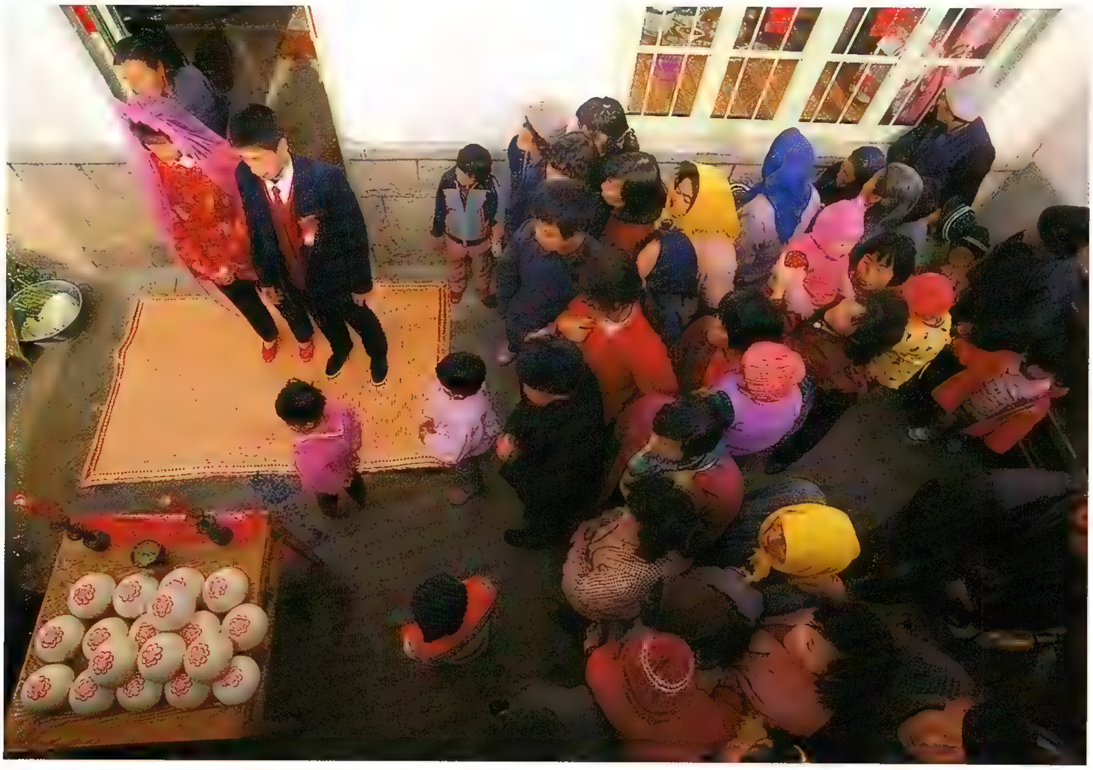
All this is perfectly reasonable to the Chinese family, where traces of the tradition of several generations living under the same roof are still apparent. However, with the progress of society, families are becoming smaller and simpler. Nowadays, most newlyweds prefer to move out of their parental homes in order to live as independent families.

Twenty years ago, the bicycle, sewing machine and wristwatches were essential components of a trousseau. Ten years later, they gave way to the television set, washing machine and refrigerator. Today, no trousseau or dowry is complete without a hi-fi music system.

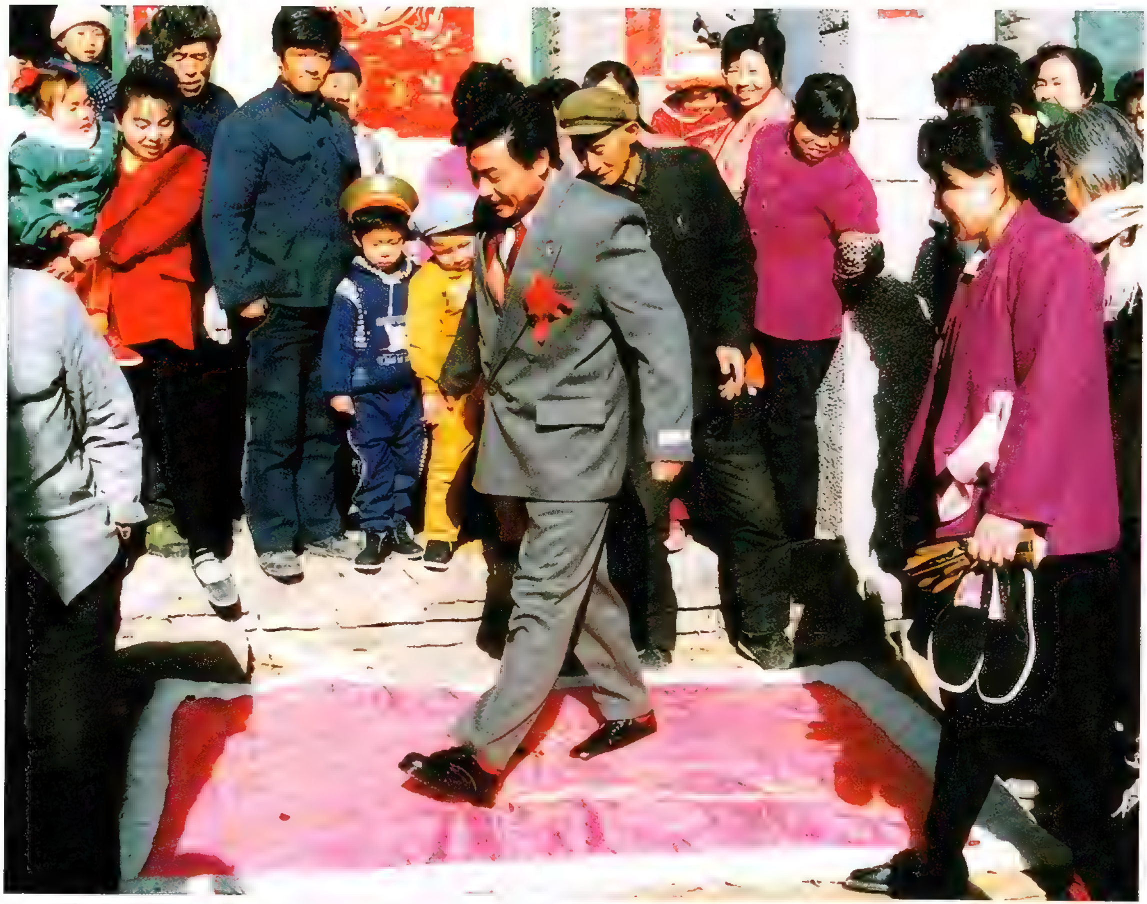
Generally speaking, weddings are more elaborate in rural areas than in cities, and they often marry at a younger age than their city counterparts. According to the Marriage Law amended in 1980, the minimum marrying age is 22 for a man and 20 for a woman. Statistics show that in the countryside the age of newlyweds averages 23.8, whereas in Shanghai, the figure is 25.8.

In Shanghai, it has become fashionable for young couples to get married by the Huangpu River so that "the Huangpu River can testify to their love". It has also become fashionable for couples to video tape the ceremony. In this photograph, it is New Year's day and these newly-weds have attracted a large crowd of onlookers. (by Yang Jianzheng)

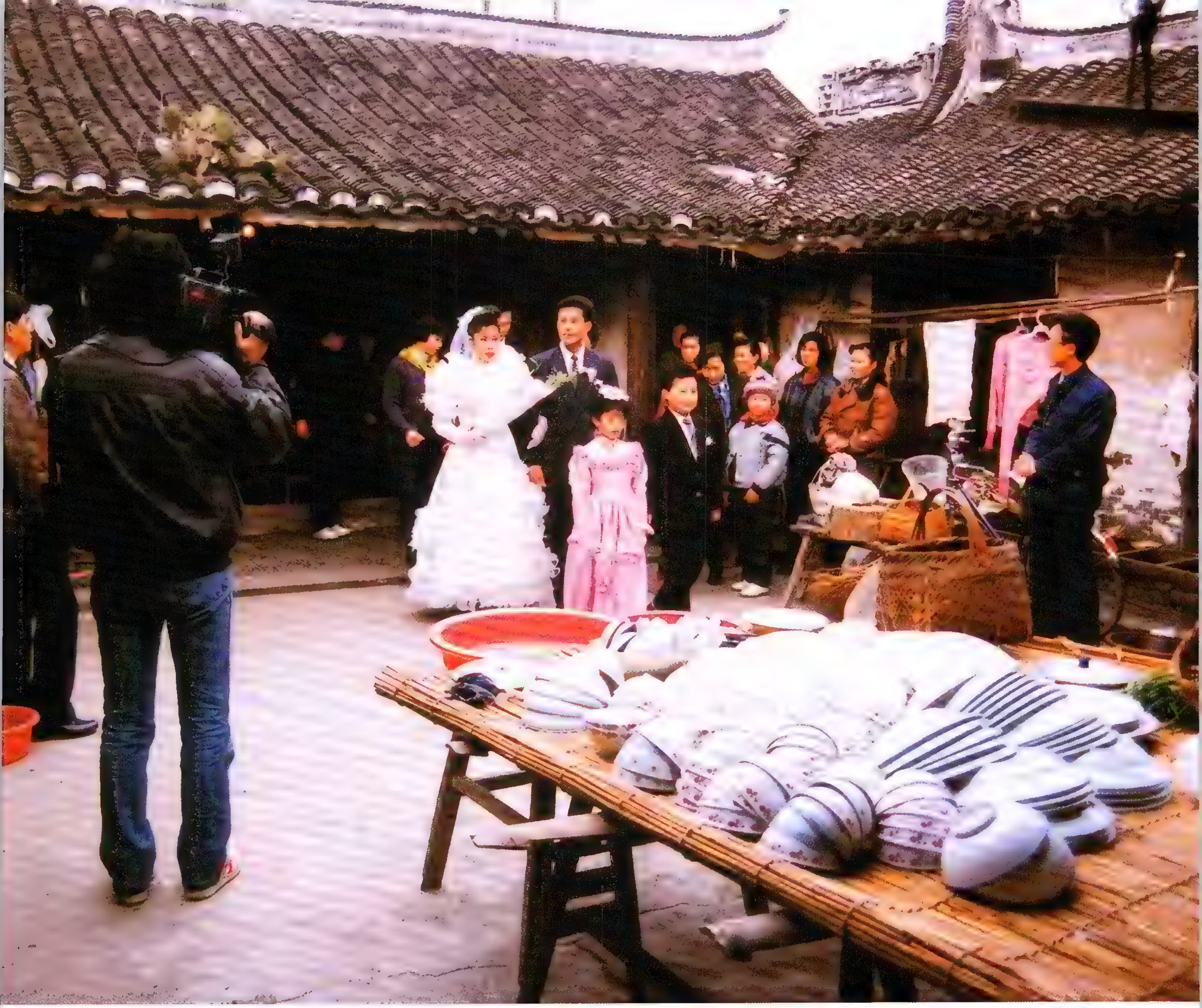
This is the wedding of a young worker in Nanchang, Jiangxi Province, whose bride also works at the same factory. Many of their colleagues have come to congratulate them and, of course, make fun of them! The last programme of merry-making is to "force" the bride and bridegroom to share a piece of candy without using their hands. Mouth to mouth, they try in vain to break the candy. The scene symbolises the saying "sticking to each other like glue, and remaining sweet to each other forever". (by Huo Shili)



This wedding ceremony takes place in a farmer's family on Yellow Island off the coast of Qingdao, Shandong Province. According to the local custom, the young couple must kow-tow three times in front of the table heaped with wine, candles, incense and steamed bread printed with the character "double happiness". But times have changed, and here, the bride prefers to give a standing salute. (by Ren Xihai)



During this wedding ceremony in Daobei Village, Shanxi Province, the groom, who wears a brand new Western-style suit and leather shoes, is asked to walk on a quilt underneath which red dates, chestnuts, coins and red peppers have been placed. The custom symbolises prosperity for the couple's future life and the birth of an eminent son very soon. (by Li Genlai)



In Shanghai's suburban Chuansha County, the wedding ceremony in a farming family is no less grand than one held in a major city. Apart from an extravagant wedding banquet, cameras and video recorders are used to make the occasion a lasting souvenir. (by Wang Hechun)

It is a jubilant day for Lishui Town in Nanhai City, Guangdong Province, where a young couple, who have been working as taxi drivers in Guangzhou, return home to hold their wedding ceremony. It appears that a flock of geese have joined the relatives in welcoming the newly-weds. (by Lin Xing)

Though dressed in a modern Western-style wedding gown, this bride in Anshan, Liaoning Province, still follows the local tradition of sitting on her bridal bed for a period of time, which is believed to make their future life together more tranquil and happy. Nowadays, this custom has been relaxed somewhat so that the length of time is shorter. (by Wei Liequn)

INCORPORATING WESTERN ELEMENTS

For a period in history, when the traditional Chinese wedding costume was no longer in fashion, the Chinese did not pay much attention to what they wore at the wedding ceremony. However, since the 1980s, everybody dresses up for the occasion and Western influences can be seen at almost every wedding. In China today, the groom is often seen wearing a Western-style suit, though the Sun Yat-sen uniform can also be seen occasionally. Most brides choose to wear a Western-style wedding gown but there are still many who prefer a well-tailored silk *qipao*, a Manchu-style dress.

Group Weddings on the Increase

Joint wedding ceremonies first appeared in Shanghai during the 1920s. Apparently borrowed from the West, such weddings were a striking contrast to the elaborate traditional Chinese wedding. At the time, grooms were seen wearing the long Chinese gown and the brides always wore the traditional body-hugging *qipao*. Today, the attire for collective wedding ceremonies has become Westernised. Beaches have become ideal places for such events, where newlyweds are seen throwing themselves into each other's embrace and kissing passionately, or dancing to romantic music.

Today, it has become a trend for young people to hold increasingly expensive weddings, therefore joint wedding ceremonies are widely encouraged. Many companies and factories have made it a policy to help hold group weddings for their employees.

Walking Down the Aisle.

Beginning from the 1980s, honeymoons became vogue and such travels often took couples to exotic places. Today, with more money to spare, and a heightened curiosity about foreign countries, more and more couples are embarking on overseas travels to spend a honeymoon.

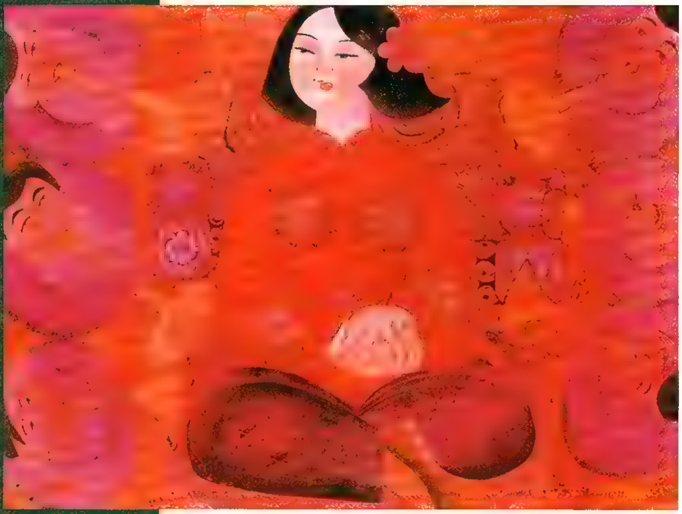
There are also those who prefer to hold their wedding ceremony in a church. The domed ceiling, the solemn and peaceful atmosphere of the church accentuated by Western music never fails to generate a romantic air to the proceedings as the couple stand before the alter and exchange wedding rings.

In China, church weddings are often combined with traditional Chinese culture. The hall is often decorated with antithetical couplets which serve to heighten the gaiety of the occasion. Among the most commonly used couplets are: "Right night, right hour make right bond; nice man, nice woman form a nice couple." "The fair lady comes from far away, like the fragrant flowers she'll accompany her man." And "Like the silk trees may they blossom together; like swallows they fly side by side."

Article translated by Ling Yuan
Captions translated by Zhenguo

Group weddings have become fashionable among young couples living in urban areas. This photograph depicts the exciting scene of 150 couples taking their marriage vows together at the Cultural Palace of the Zhongyuan (Central Plains) Oilfield in Puyang City, Henan Province. (by Jiang Yulin)

It is spring on the beach in Qingdao. Several couples who have just been married perform the last ritual, the kiss. Ceremonies like this have become quite a "sight" in Qingdao. (by Wang Baogang)

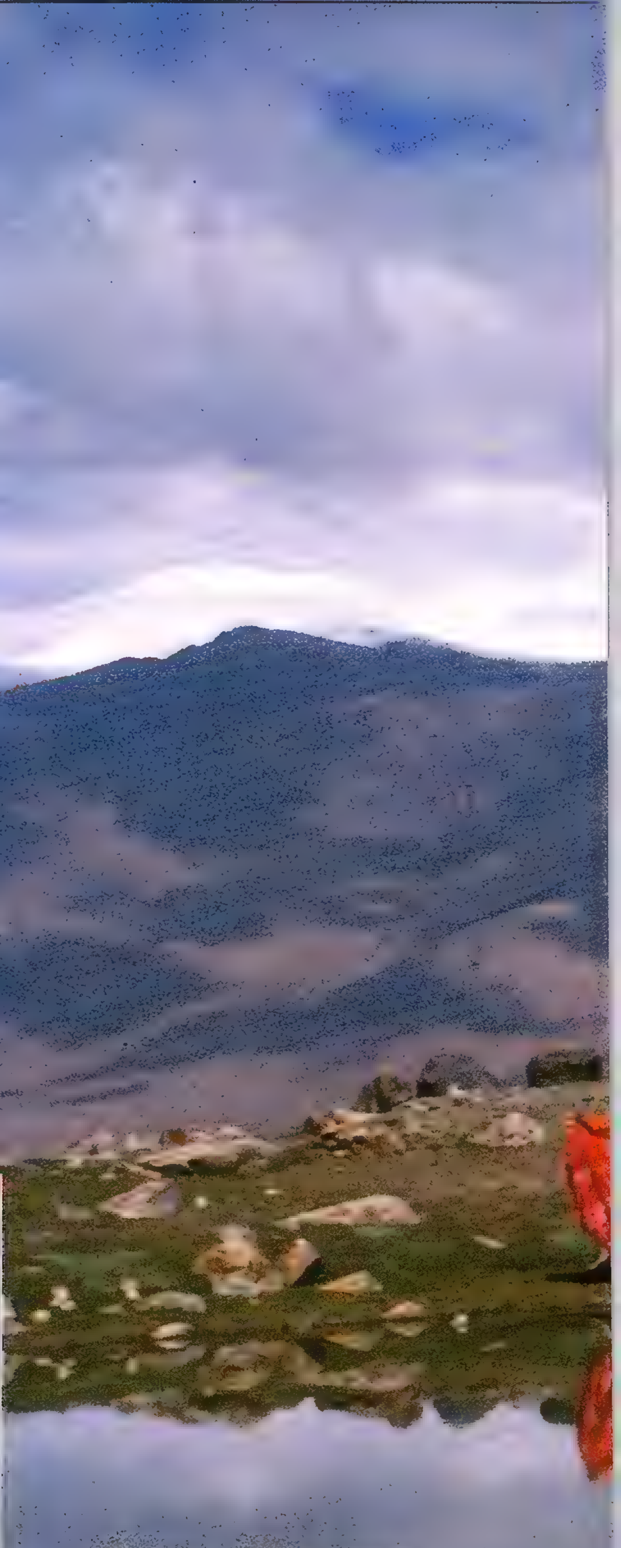


Entering the Nuptial Chamber, a New Year picture by Liu Zhumei from Sichuan Province (by Liu Guangpu)

MARRIAGE CUSTOMS OF ETHNIC MINORITIES

1

1. People play drums and flutes at the wedding to wish the newly-weds well. (by Bao Di)
2. Singing and dancing accompany the entire wedding ceremony of the Tajiks living on the Pamir Highland in Xinjiang. This group of people singing and dancing at the foot of snow-covered peaks are on their way to fetch the bride. (by Bao Di)



THE TAJIKS

Sprinkling Wheat Flour on the Shoulders

Most Tajiks live in Taxkorgan Tajik Autonomous County while the remainder reside in the counties of Shache, Zepu, Yecheng and Pishan. Their weddings usually take place in autumn (August to September) when the plains of the Pamir Highland glow in a beautiful hue of gold.

Whenever there is a wedding, all relatives and friends of the couple come to give their congratulations, no matter how far the distance. The female guests arrive carrying wheat flour which they spread over the walls of their hosts – it is their particular way of wishing the newly-weds well. On the morning of the wedding, the bridegroom,

dressed in his Sunday best and accompanied by his entourage, goes to the home of his parents-in-law to pick up his bride. He first greets the senior members of the family, and then his parents-in-law who kiss him on his eyes and forehead, signifying that his marriage to their daughter has their blessing.

The wedding ceremony which immediately follows is most likely to be conducted according to the Moslem faith. An imam who presides over the proceedings first reads passages from the Koran. Then the bride and bridegroom exchange rings tied with red and white cloth to indicate that they will always be devoted to each other. Next, they share the same piece of meat and the same piece of baked bread, and drink salty water from the same bowl, suggesting that they will share happiness and woe in their life. Finally, the imam will sprinkle some wheat flour on the shoulders of the young couple and then the guests.

This practice expresses the wish that the newlyweds will stay together throughout their lifetimes, even when their hair turns white.

In the village of the bride, the celebrations commence with a series of recreational events such as competing to catch sheep and horse racing. In the evening, young villagers will sing and dance in the courtyard of the bride's family until late at night.

The next morning, everyone in the village comes to give the bride a send-off. When the procession coming to pick her up arrives at the bridegroom's home, young people from his village begin to dance to express their congratulations. Before the bride has reached her new home, her mother-in-law will come out to meet her by fondly kissing her on the forehead. At the home of the bridegroom, the celebrations will continue for three days. It is only in the afternoon of the third day that the veil is lifted from the bride's head by the master of ceremonies.

THE YAOS

Sweeping the Bridal Chamber Three Times

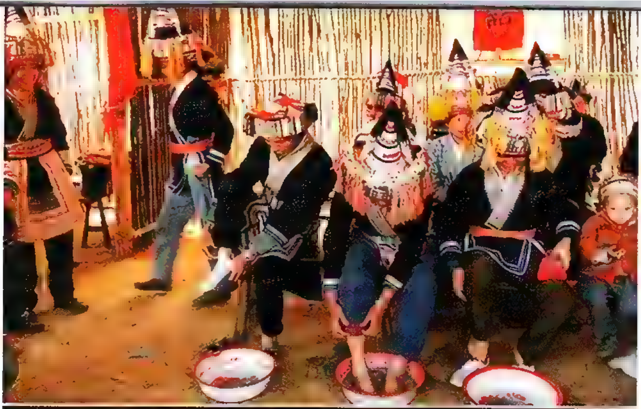
The Yao people live in 130 counties of China's six provinces and regions, including Guizhou, Guangxi and Hunan. Owing to the varying legends referring to their origins, the Yaos in different places call themselves with different names such as "Cross Mountain Yao", "Back Basket Yao", etc.

The marriage customs of the Black-Pants Yao living in Libo County in Guizhou are simple but interesting. There is no need to consult a matchmaker or a fortune-teller to pick an auspicious date for the wedding; it is simply chosen by the couple. All they have to do is to inform their parents several days ahead. The wedding ceremony itself takes place in the late evening. The young man goes to pick up his bride, taking a gift for his bride a pair of new shoes and sock. The bride wears her best outfit and leaves with the groom for his home, alone and without a dowry.

Once home, several young girls run into the room, where the treadle-operated tilt hammer used to hull rice is kept, and proceed to beat the hammer as loud as possible. The sound tells the whole village that the bride has arrived at the home of the young man. Two or three days later, the woman returns to her parents' house for an overnight visit, thereafter she will return to live in her husband's house.

When people of the White-Pants Yao get married the bride does not immediately enter the nuptial chamber, instead she takes time to sit around a fire together with the guests who have accompanied her over from her own home. First she is treated with a gruel made with bitter wild vegetables of which the more she eats, the more she delights her husband. Then she is given two pieces of meat and two cups of wine, indicating that she has accepted the love of her new family.

Then the nuptial chamber will be "swept" three times. First, the room is swept with a golden bamboo broom, which suggests that the couple will have many children. Then, the head of the village enters. Carrying a large chicken in hand, he circles the room 12 times and chants as he walks. This signifies the second sweeping, the chicken is believed to be a reincarnation of the bride. Finally, rice and coins brought by the bride from her home are scattered outside the room, symbolising the third "sweeping". During each of the three activities, onlookers sing a nuptial chamber song. When all of this is over, the bride is led by her uncle to cross the fire, kick away the three machetes lying on the threshold and finally enter her bridal chamber. The bridegroom's family immediately kills a chicken and cooks it for the girl's uncle to show their gratitude. Once he has eaten the chicken, the uncle and his party depart, but one girl from the bride's entourage remains to keep the new bride company during her first night when the bridegroom is not allowed to enter the chamber.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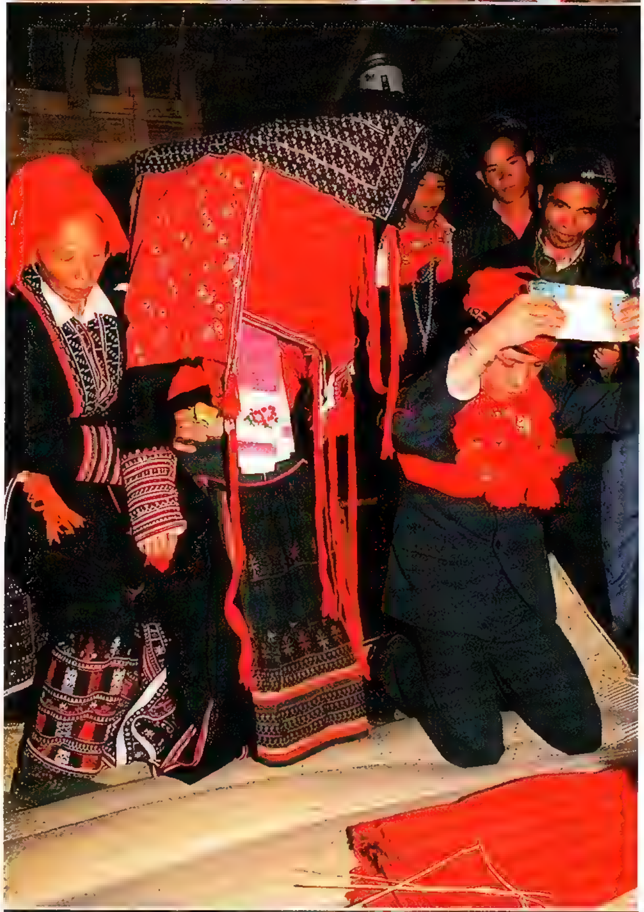
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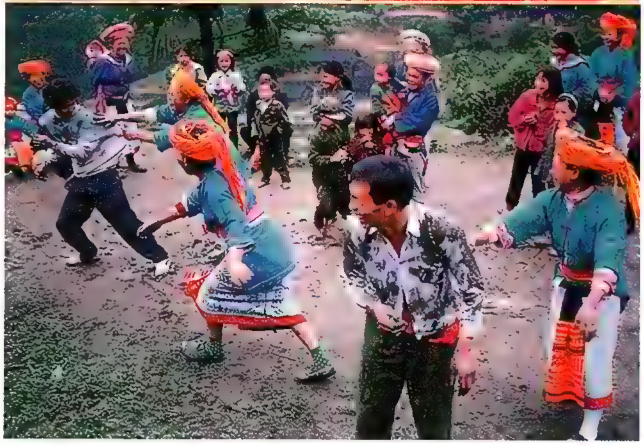
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1. **At a wedding in Liandong Village, Guangxi, guests from the bride's family are not only treated to tea and cigarettes, but also served with hot water to wash their feet. (by Li Qing)**
2. **The wedding day of a young Yao couple from Hekou County, Yunnan. A bamboo frame is made and fastened to the bride's hair, from which a red veil is draped. (by Liu Jianming)**
3. **The Flower Yaos living in Yaoshan, Hunan Province, has an ancient tradition of announcing an engagement by throwing mud at each other. (by Wei Rongguang)**

THE TUJIAS

Blocking the Entourage

The evening before the wedding, the bridegroom's family sends an entourage to collect the bride. Upon their arrival, a gate keeper blocks their entry. The master of protocol and the gate keeper then offer each other wine and begin an antiphonal singing. If the master of protocol is not as witty as the gate keeper, he has to present a set of gifts before he and his party are allowed to enter. This day is called the "day of gift exchanging".

The next day is the official wedding day. After the bride has eaten the "feast for bidding farewell to mother", she leaves on the waiting sedan chair, the bride-welcoming entourage lights two torches of happiness and fires guns to announce their departure. The girl's family make sweeping motions so that the bride will not take away all the spirit of fortune with her, but once outside the gate, she will snatch one of the torches, indicating half the fortune will stay with her new family.

When the sedan chair arrives at the bridegroom's home, his family places a pig's head and a butcher's knife outside the house as offerings to the gods. Then two women on the bridegroom's side, called "bride-welcoming maids", help the bride out of the sedan chair (the two women are eligible for this task only if they have their own families complete with husbands and children). Now both dressed in red and wearing wedding shoes, the bride and bridegroom bow to the heaven, earth, parents and each other. When the bride arrives in her new home, her parents-in-law must stay upstairs in order not to meet the bride, as people believe that if they see each other on this occasion, the family will run into misfortune.

1

1. **Firecrackers are set off to indicate the solemnity of the wedding. (by Yuan Xuejun)**
2. **Merry-making in the nuptial chamber is great fun not only for the newly-weds but also for the people of this Tujia village. (by Yuan Xuejun)**

2

THE EWENKIS

Picking Up the Bride with Reindeer

The weddings of the nomadic Ewenkis living along the Ergun Rivers and in the Greater Hinggan Mountains are also distinctive. On the wedding day, the bridegroom is accompanied by his parents and all relatives to the home of his bride, where he will spend his first night of married life. The procession is led by a male elder holding a portrait of the god, followed by the bridegroom, his parents and other villagers. At the rear are people pulling reindeer. The greeting party on the bride's side is also formed in same order. When the two parties meet, the bride and her groom kiss the image of the god first. Then they pick out the two best reindeer from the bridegroom's procession and lead them to walk around the bride's home three times. Once this is done, all the people gather inside for the feast.

Some hunters choose to celebrate their weddings out in the wilderness. This is usually held around a bonfire by the river. An elder announces the beginning of the wedding and pours wine into two cups made from the bark of birch tree. Upon receiving the cups, the bride and bridegroom pour the wine over the fire in a sacrifice to the fire.

The singing and dancing lasts throughout the night. It is not until the next morning that the bridegroom takes his bride home, accompanied by her herd of reindeer. Once they arrive at the bridegroom's home, they are officially married.

Left page: The Ewenkis in Aoluguya Township located deep in the forests of Greater Hinggan Mountains make their living by raising reindeer and so weddings are often held on the farms. This Ewenki bride is being fetched on a reindeer following the tradition of this ethnic minority group. (by He Chongyun)

THE LISUS

Beating Up the Ghost

The majority of the Lisu ethnic group live along the Nujiang River in Yunnan Province. As part of the preparation for the wedding, a symbolic gate is built in front of the nuptial room at the bridegroom's home, outside which are placed a pig's head and a cup of wine. According to the local custom, the person from the bride's party who kicks over the wine cup has the honour to congratulate the couple first and also gets to keep the pig's head. Another custom is "beating up the ghost". Men hidden inside the nuptial chamber throw small pieces of wood over the bride. The purpose is to drive away the evil spirits the bride may have brought with her. The bride's party has to hand over gifts of rice cakes before they are allowed to enter.

Drinking "wine of the same heart", signifying a happy life toughter (by Zhao Qiwen)

At the start of the wedding ceremony, singers from each side line up to sing their congratulations. Then, every guest must drink three cups of wine before he or she enters the house. Then, together the hosts and guests sit in the room and sing antiphonal banquet songs. After the feast, the matchmaker and an elder select a new name for the bride and bridegroom to congratulate them on becoming husband and wife. Then each of the guests is given a pan of food to take home and share with their families.

In the Lisu communities in Gaoligong and Biluo mountains, a band and witty singers are invited. As the bride and her party enter the bridegroom's courtyard, *Welcome to the Bride* is sung. It is the custom that eight young men enter the new house first. They dance happily and kick the floor very hard to test whether the bride's new home is solid and well-built.

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THE KOREANS

Holding A Double Wedding

Early in the morning on the wedding day, the bridegroom goes to the ancestral temple and officially tells his father that his marriage will take place soon. The wedding begins at the home of the bride. The bridegroom and his entourage travel to the home of his bride. The procession is headed by a man holding a pair of wooden swans. At their destination, the first thing the bridegroom does is to present the wooden swans to the bride's mother or a relative.

Inside the house, the bridegroom sits on the west side and the bride on the east side. The man first expresses his respect for his bride and offers her a cup of wine. The bride kneels down to receive the wine and then returns it to her man. Together they then proceed to the dining room where a banquet has been prepared.

The bridegroom remains at his girl's home for the following three days, during which time, young people in the village do everything they can to make fun of him. They always have a lot of ridiculous questions and conundrums for the bridegroom to answer. Once the bridegroom is finally able to take his bride home, a ceremony is held and a feast is given in honour of the bride at his house to mark the end of the wedding ceremony.

Among Koreans living in Liaoning Province and Heilongjiang Province, there exists the custom of a double wedding. The first ceremony is held when the bridegroom goes to the bride's home and stays for three days. He then returns to his own home to live by himself for two weeks. No less than several months to a year later is he invited back by his bride's family and allowed to take home his bride. On the agreed day, the bridegroom leaves first to his home to wait for the girl, who arrives in a sedan chair.

Upon her arrival, no ceremonial activities are held, except for an elaborate feast. The next day, she goes into the courtyard to kneel down to show respect for her parents-in-law and her husband's uncles and aunts by offering each of them a cup of wine. Then, the birde goes to greet her brothers- and sisters-in-law to complete the final part of the wedding procedure.

1. At a wedding of the Koreans living in Mapai Village, Jilin Province, the young couple kow-tow in front of the bride's parents to thank them for raising her well. (by Lu Guang)

2. Once inside the nuptial chamber, the couple have to Kow-tow to each other to show their respect for each other and to wish for a happy and harmonious life. (by Lu Guang)

THE YIS

Starving the Bride for Days

The Yi communities are scattered in several provinces including Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou and Guangxi, with the Major and Lesser Liangshan mountains as the most concentrated areas. One of the marriage customs of the Yi people is for the bride to go through a period of starvation. Ten days before the marriage, the bride begins to reduce her intake of food and water until eventually, during the last three days, she is allowed only one meal and one mouthful of water a day. She does this mainly to avoid the need to visit the toilet on her way to her new home and during her first three days of married life as the Yi people believe it improper to do so.

On the day that she leaves home, her brothers, sisters and friends take great delight in splashing water on the man's party who have come to pick her up. It is believed that if the water splashing is done thoroughly, the bride will never have to carry water from any great distance and that she will never know drought throughout her married life.

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During the wedding of the Yi people in Puge, Sichuan, several friendly competitions take place as part of the proceedings. For example, before the bride arrives the young men bring over a sheep for slaughter but the girls of the village try to take the sheep away. If they succeed, the men have to offer wine to the girls in order to "buy" back the sheep. If a girl refuses to drink, she can pick out a young man of her liking to drink it for her. This competition provides an opportunity for young people to meet and express their love for one another.

When the bride arrives at the village with her welcoming party, a respected elder invites a representative from her party to examine the new house. In the meantime, the young men in her party are splashed with water by the girls.

In the nuptial room, the bride checks her make-up and soon after a sister-in-law arrives to offer a plate of meat and rice. The young men on the bride's side and the girls from the groom's village will "struggle" with each other to grab a piece of the food as it is believed that the winning team will have good luck. Their rivalry adds gaiety to the wedding.

The next day, the bride returns to her home to visit her family and the sister-in-law who has accompanied the bride to her new home becomes the "object" of competition between the young men and women.

1. **One stage of the wedding proceedings is "waiting" – the young bride pictured here is "waiting" for her bridegroom. (by Han Yuanhua)**
2. **Among the Yis in Sichuan, the bridegroom's family sends two young men carrying wine to the bride's home to signal that the wedding will take place as planned. The two young men are subjected to all kinds of teasing by the village girls, including being splashed with water and having their faces painted black. (by Han Yuanhua)**

1

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THE MONGOLIANS

Feasting over Days and Nights

Most of the Chinese Mongolians live in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, but they are also found in other regions and provinces such as Xinjiang, Liaoning and Jilin. The Mongolians living on the grassland follow more solemn marriage rituals. On the day of wedding, the bridegroom dresses in brand new clothes and a pair of high boots. He also carries a bow and a set of arrows at his waist to give himself the air of a strong and mighty warrior. In the company of his relatives and friends, he mounts his horse and gallops towards the home of his bride, only to find the entrance to the yurt tightly sealed and guarded by the bridesmaids and the bride's relatives who stand outside the yurt in a semi-circle, pretending they do not consent to the match. Then an elder from the man's party approaches the group to explain: "This is a lucky day for so and so to get married. We are here to help with the marriage." Then a verbal battle ensues, the elder always wins! Helpless, the bridesmaids open up the flaps to allow the bridegroom and his party enter the yurt. The bridegroom first bows to the Buddha and the kitchen god, he then presents each of the woman's parents with a *hada*, a piece of silk, and other gifts.

Almost immediately the young men on the bride's side start to make fun of the bridegroom. In the western part of Inner Mongolia, a sheep's neck is presented and the bridegroom is supposed to prove his strength by breaking it with his bare hands. The bridegroom sees the trick – some red willow twigs have been inserted thus making it impossible to break. There are other tricks for him to solve and the yurt is filled with laughter. When this is over, the bride puts on a bright red scarf and her best clothes. Amidst the singing of good wishes, she mounts a horse, circles the yurt three times and bids farewell to her parents and sisters.

According to custom, the bridegroom has to arrive home first but the bride's relatives always find ways to prevent him from doing so. Someone might snatch away his hat, throwing it to the ground in an deliberate attempt to occupy his time. However, the bridegroom's party has its way of dealing with this – shortly before they arrive at his home, they prepare a feast to entertain the bride and her entourage. Meanwhile, the bridegroom seizes the opportunity to run home so as to be there to greet his bride and her party.

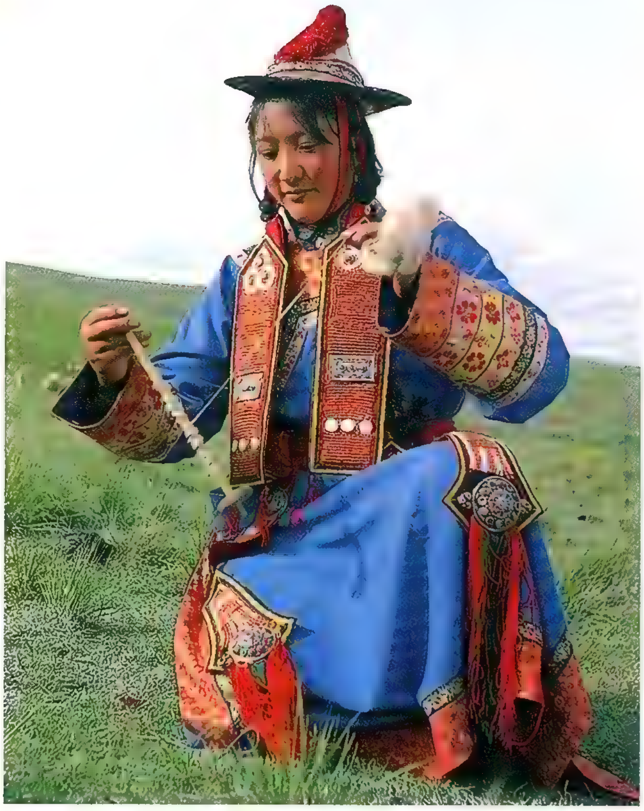
The bride and bridegroom, having dismounted but still holding their horse whips, cross over two fires together to symbolise their deep love for each other and their wish for a happy life together. Then, each holding a sheep's shoulder blade in hand, they bow to the heaven and earth followed by the chanting of the lamas for good wishes.

A banquet follows. Usually a roasted whole sheep is served. The bride and bridegroom offer wine to all the guests while people at the dinner play Mongolian musical instruments to accompany their singing and drinking. The feast normally lasts two to three days. Finally, people present gifts to the cook before they return home.

3

1. The traditional wedding costume worn by Mongolian brides (by Erbo)
2. Before the wedding day, the bridegroom sends gifts of oxen and horses to his bride's family, a practice typical of life on the grassland. (by Erbo)
3. A huge crowd of herdsmen gathering outside the nuptial chamber (by Erbo)
4. Under a clear blue sky, the newly-weds receive congratulations from relatives and friends. (by Erbo)

4



1

THE YUGURS

Overturning the Wedding Tent

Most of the Yugur ethnic group live in Gansu Province. Singing constitutes an important part of their weddings. The day before the wedding, the guests from both sides are entertained at the bride's home. Each side has its own singer. The singer belonging to the bride's family sings words expressing the hardship of being a woman and then sings a welcome to each of the guests in order of their seniority.

Dear guest, please be seated,
We wish to take you to paradise,
We wish to take you to the sky,
But our house is small and the felt wall thin,
Please forgive us for any oversight in our entertainment.

The second day, relatives help to dress the bride, the final item is to place a veil over her head. Her mother's brother then sings:

Venus shines brightly,
The girl is up and gets dressed.
The sun is out,
It is time she puts on her veil.

Now the girl sings a farewell song to her parents. In the past, the girl had to make up her own words. However, since most brides are too shy to sing, a male singer of the family usually does the job for her.

Papa, thank you for your teaching,
Mama, thank you for bringing me up.
Take good care of yourselves and
Now I have to leave for my new home.

When the singing is over, the bride is carried by her brother onto the camel to ride to her husband's home. On the way, they are intercepted three times by the bridegroom's party who express their welcome by offering wine, meat and *hada*. Before they reach the man's home, one member of the girl's party will switch to a better horse and quickly ride to the bridegroom's home to check out how the preparations are coming along. Then he comes back to report to the eldest member of the sending-off party that a yurt has been built, that meat has been piled up and jugs have been filled with wine. The scouting is repeated three times before the party finally arrives at the bridegroom's home. The welcome reception consists of setting off firecrackers, after which, the singer from the man's side sings:

The camel is neighing,
The hoofs are clattering.
Please dismount and come into the wedding chamber.

The bride's brother now lifts his sister off the camel and carries her to the front of the yurt. Here the bridegroom shoots three "arrows" toward the girl, an action supposed to expel all evil spirits. He then carries his bride into the yurt.

Now it is the turn of the bridegroom's family to offer wine to all the guests. While the bride and bridegroom leave the yurt to kow-tow in the open, the merry-making villagers take the opportunity to pull down the wedding yurt, suggesting that the couple have no home to go and therefore they should stay with them. Together they sing, eat and drink. The guests will not leave until they have had eaten a hearty meal and been given a chunk of meat.

2

1. After the wedding, the bride tends the animals for two to three days during which time, she has to spin one piece of wool yarn and fetch a bundle of firewood to show that she is a diligent person. (by Tian Zicheng)

2. The solemn wedding of a Yugur couple from Yugur Autonomous County in south Gansu Province. To send off the bride according to tradition, the entourage has to follow a pre-determined route. If a house blocks their path they simply have to make a small detour. (by Tian Zicheng)

THE BAIS

Drinking a Real Hot Spirit

For the Bai people living in the Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province the wedding process takes four days. Before the wedding, the bride sits squarely in her room, placing both feet on a container filled with grain, which symbolises that she will enjoy affluence in her married life. When the bridegroom arrives at the bride's home, the bridesmaids offer him first honey tea and then butterfly tea, suggesting that the couple will love each other and live a happy life just like the two legendary characters Wengu and Xialiang. After they have exchanged gifts, the bride and bridegroom sit in two separate sedan chairs or horse-drawn carts to begin their journey to his home.

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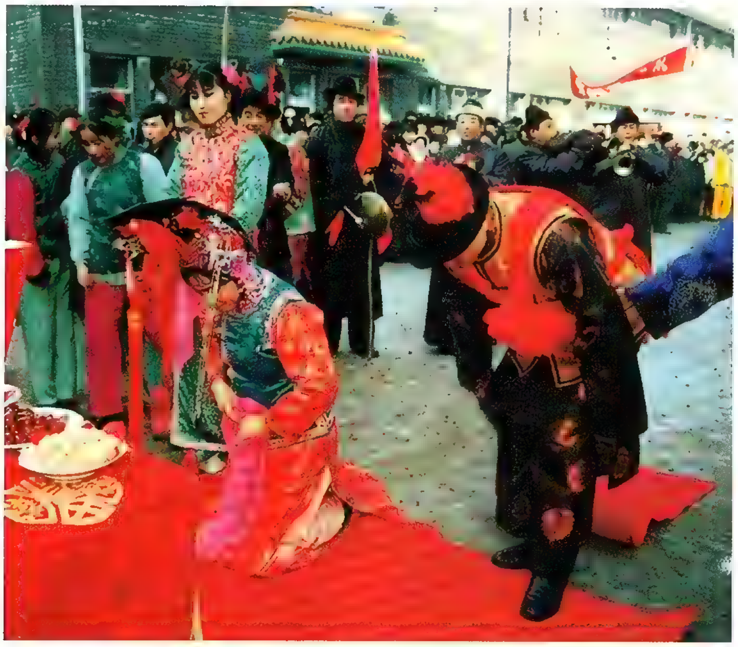
3

1. In Eryuan of Dali, Yunnan Province, the bride should "cry" before leaving as a way to thank her parents for raising her. (by Liu Jianming)
2. Before the bride is taken into the nuptial chamber, the children compete to "pinch" the bride for wishing her good luck – a unique custom among the Bai people in Eryuan. (by Liu Jianming)
3. Before leaving, the bride is fed by her mother, signifying the last meal with her family. (by Yang Huanying)

Upon arrival at her new home, the bride has to present a pair of shoes to all her in-laws – parents, brothers, sisters, cousins, nephews and nieces. For the Bai people in Jianchuan and Eryuan, stones and sweets are placed in each corner of the bride's clothes trunk as a reminder for her to be docile. A young girl and two boys are invited to sleep in the nuptial bed to warm it up to symbolise that in her new home, she will enjoy good luck and warmth. When the new couple enters the nuptial chamber, they are served bitter tea first and then sweet tea, signifying that in their life hardship will be followed by sweetness. Next they drink wine mixed with hot chilli powder from each other's cup, and all the relatives and friends also have a cup of this spicy wine. In Bai dialect, the word "hot" is a homonym to the word "dear", thus the chilli wine is a symbol of a harmonious, loving life.

On the day before the wedding, among the Bais at Lanping, the bridegroom is required to go to the clan temple to offer sacrifices. Then he makes offerings to a big tree and a pond near the village, begging the gods to ensure he will have a happy life with many sons.

When the bridegroom arrives to pick up his bride, a ceremony of "opening the gate" is held in front of a colourful archway built outside her house. In front of the archway, a bench is placed, a dustpan is hung and three incenses are lit. On the bench are two cups, one with tea and the other with wine. Two sharp-tongued gate keepers prevent the bridegroom and his party from entering. Amidst banter and cheers, the bridegroom finally manages to enter the bride's home.



THE MANCHUS

Bowing to the Big Dipper

The Manchu people live mostly in Liaoning Province, but are also found in Jilin, Heilongjiang and Hebei provinces as well as cities such as Beijing and Chengdu. The Manchu usually get engaged for two to three years.

The day before the wedding, the bridegroom arrives on horseback at the bride's home bearing a gift for his new parents-in-law, usually pork chops. The bride, accompanied by her bridesmaids, travels to stay in a dwelling which has been rented near to her new husband's home. This tradition has been handed down by the Eight-Banner Manchu Army which stationed along the border during the Qing Dynasty. A woman who was to marry an army man had to travel long distances. Upon arrival at his barracks, she had to stay in a borrowed house until she was formally married.

The early Manchus living as hunters in the primitive forests regarded the Big Dipper as their god because it helped them find their direction. So at the wedding ceremony, the newly-weds bow to the Big Dipper first. Then the bridegroom removes his bride's veil with the beam of a steelyard or a horse whip. The use of the steelyard beam symbolises total satisfaction. While taking off the veil, the bridegroom touches the bride's hair, signifying that from this day on they are husband and wife. The bride then enters her room to sit on the *kang* (an earthen bed) for the whole duration of the wedding banquet. When she finally gets off the *kang* , she steps into the shoes of her mother-in-law to suggest that she will follow in the footsteps of the older woman to run all household affairs well. Then, the couple enters the bridal chamber together. They race to be the first to sit on the bed – whoever wins will be the real master of the family. They then drink from each other's wine cup and eat half-cooked dumplings. The word for half-cooked, *sheng*, symbolises giving birth to many children. On behalf of the bride, the bridegroom sticks a colour paper flower on the window. It is believed that the lower he places it, the sooner they will have their first child.

Candles are burned throughout the first night while people sing songs outside. Some throw black beans into the bridal chamber to wish the couple a happy life with many children.

1.According to Manchu tradition, the bride and bridegroom bow in the direction of the Big Dipper. (by Su Changde)

2.This bridegroom riding on horseback leads the cart to pick up his bride. (by Zhu Gongfu)

3.It is the custom that a respected old woman and a boy go to pick up the bride in a colourfully decorated cart. (by Zhu Gongfu)

THE DAIS

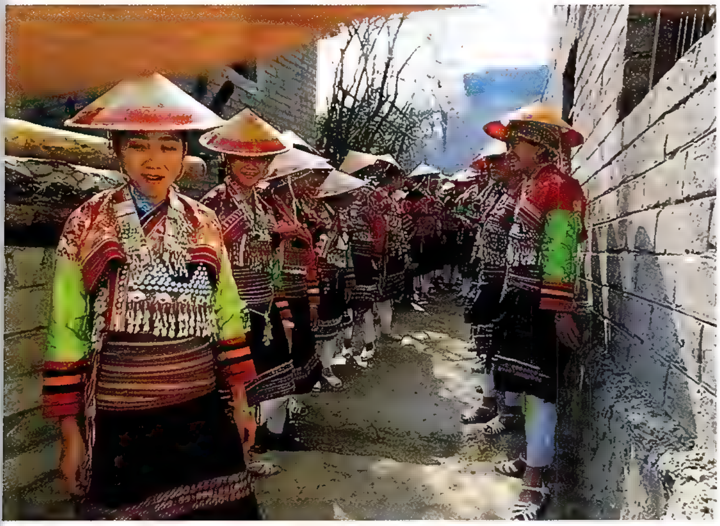
Busying the Whole Village

The Colourful-Waist Dais residing in Gali in the Yuanjiang River Valley belong to the same ethnic group as the Dais living in Xishuangbanna and Dehong, Yunnan Province.

Their weddings are occasions for the whole village to get involved and are therefore very elaborate – the whole village gets busy with preparations, as if there were to be a wedding in every household. On the day of the wedding, each of the families kill either a chicken or duck, or even an ox or pig.

Early in the morning, several "veteran male matchmakers" arrive at the bride's home. They are respectable elderly relatives entrusted by both families of the bride and bridegroom. Collectively, they preside over the wedding and drink as they perform their duties as master of ceremonies.

Their first order is given to the girl's mother for god worshipping. She prays in front of the altar found in every household of the Colourful-Waist Dais. Dutifully, she reports on the situation of her own family, the bridegroom's family, the hopes of her daughter, the attitude of her husband and herself, and begs for the god's approval of the marriage and for the protection of the young couple. Then, she waits for the reply of the god and reports it back to the matchmakers. Only when the god agrees to the marriage, does the wedding take place.



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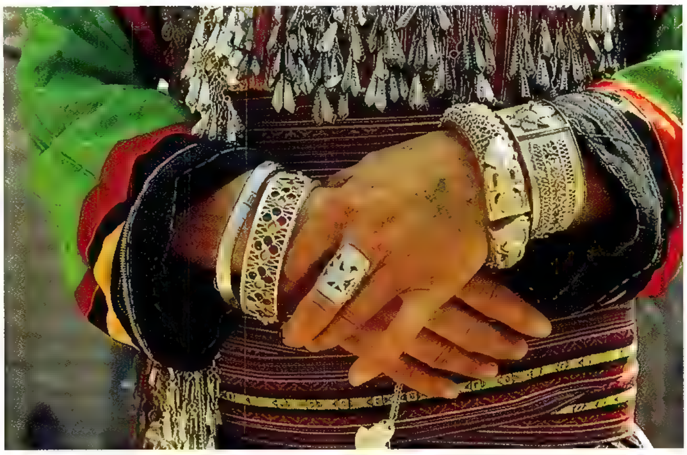

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1. A wedding of the Colourful-Waist Dais in Pingzhai, Yunnan, is about to take place. Friends of the bride are clad in their Sunday best, waiting to accompany her to her husband's home. (by Li Zhixiong)
2. With the help of her family, this bride becomes the most beautiful girl in the village. Her clothing and jewellery are worth a fortune. (by Li Zhixiong)

Then comes the second order: the bride begins to dress up. For her wedding, the bride wears her best clothes. She puts on five skirts, each of which is fastened with a colourful belt made from red, yellow, green and blue silk threads. Meticulously woven, the brightly-coloured rainbow belts are probably what have given this ethnic group its name. Silver ornaments are also tied to the belts, further setting off the waist band and forming the most eye-catching part of the outfit.

There are two wedding feasts on the day: the first is held in the bride's home in the morning, the second in the bridegroom's home in the afternoon. During the morning feast, colourfully dressed female relatives represent the bride and serve wine to the guests who in turn place a one-yuan note on a tray for each of their cup as a token of thanks for the feast. At the banquet hosted by the bridegroom's family, it is the turn of the young couple to serve the wine. While they visit each table they engage in light-hearted banter with the guests and receive words of congratulation.

1

2

THE KAZAKS

Unveiling the Bride with Singing

Marriage customs of the Kazaks in Mori and Barkol counties, Xinjiang, have maintained their ancient nomad style in many ways. Unlike other ethnic groups also believing in Islam, the Kazak wedding is not presided over by a mullah, instead, the wedding is celebrated by holding a singing party.

A day or two before the wedding, a noble elder of the bride's clan arrives to wish her a happy marriage. Then, her family begins to slaughter oxen, horses and sheep to prepare the wedding feast. On the wedding day, everyone who has heard the news is welcome to the celebration. Wedding songs are sung – men sing for wisdom and courage and women sing for ideals and good wishes. Brothers of the bridegroom or his best men come to the front of the girl's yurt and spontaneously make up words along to the tune of *Marriage Persuasion*. Girls inside the yurt will reply on behalf of the bride. It is a light-hearted competition between the two groups of singers and if the women lose they have to offer the male singers gifts consisting of handkerchiefs and square pieces of cloth. If the reverse is the case, the men give the women the same kinds of gifts, plus owls' feathers.

When it is time for the bride to leave her parental home, she sings *Tears for the Marriage* as a way to bid farewell to her parents and relatives. At her new home, she is greeted by her mother-in-law, sisters-in-law as well as other female relatives on the bridegroom's side. They distribute cheese and other foods to the bride and to the guests who are happy to share the food of good luck. Then the bride is led into the nuptial room. When the wedding begins, the bride is taken to the felt yurt of her parents-in-law for the ceremony of removing the veil. The ceremony, hosted by a young man, begins with *Song of Beginning*, then *Song for Unveiling the Bride*. The contents of the songs are mostly in praise of the bride, introductions to the bridegroom's family, as well as words of advice to her. During the intervals of chapters, he will make gestures to remove the bride's veil. When the veil is finally removed, the bride bows to her parents-in-law and pours some oil on the stove to animate the fire, which serves as a symbol of good luck.

The bride then is required to sit on the skin of a freshly slaughtered sheep as it is believed that doing so will help her have smooth labour while giving birth to babies later on. Following the feast are many games played on the grassland and the singing for well-wishes to the newly-weds continues well into the next morning.

Translated by F. Huang

1. Horses are considered indispensable for bringing home the bride. (by Song Shijing)

2. This young man works in the capital city of Urümqi but returns to his hometown to have his wedding ceremony held in the traditional way of the Kazaks. (by Wang Weijun)

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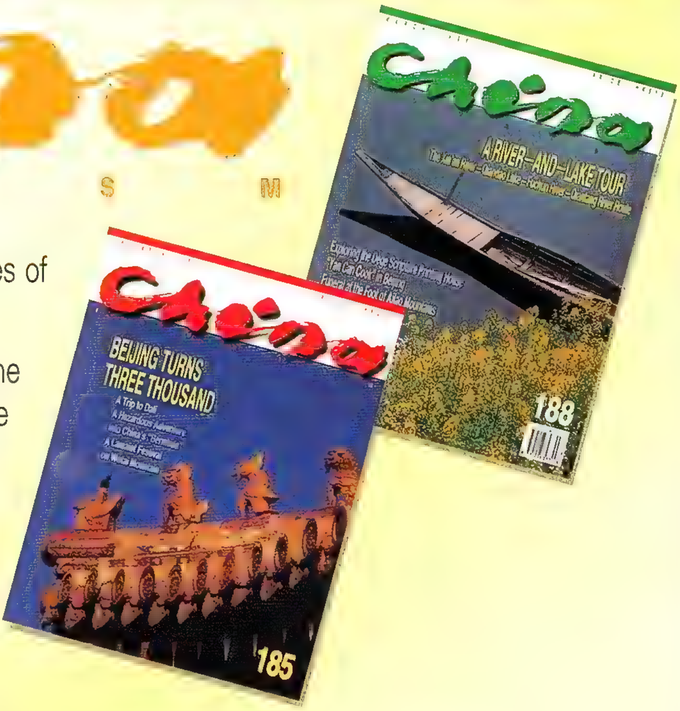

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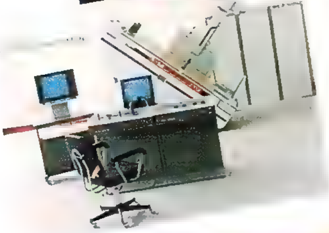

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103, Buyoo Building 3-8-16, Nihombashi
Chuo-ku, Tokyo, Japan
Tel: (81-3)3273-5512 Fax: (81-3)3273-2667
Tlx: 242-3968 CTSJPN J

P.T. Cempaka Travelindo Service
JL. Hayam Wuruk No.97, Jakarta-Barat, Indonesia
Tel: (62-21)6294452, 6007455 Fax: (62-21)6294836

China Travel & Trading (Deutschland) GmbH
Dusseldorfer Strasse 14, D-60329 Frankfurt/Main,
F.R. Germany
Tel: (49-69)238522 Fax: (49-69)232324

China Travel & Trading (Deutschland) GmbH (Berlin Office)
Beussclstraßc 5, D-10553 Berlin, Germany
Tel: (49-30)3934068
Fax: (49-30)3918085

China Travel System (M) Sdn Bhd.
Ground Floor, No. 112-114 Jalan Pudu, 55100
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Tel: (60-3)201-8888 Fax: (60-3)201-3268

浙江興光可可製品有限公司

ZHEJIANG XINGGUANG COCOA - PRODUCTS CO., LTD.

COCOA POWDER

A Brief Introduction

Xingguang Cocoa – products Company Limited is a joint venture enterprise integrating import, export production. The company is located in the north of Shaoxing city, nearby No. 104 highway, Hu-Hang-Yong Expressway, Hang-Yong Railway and the Grand Canal, so the transportation is very convenient.

The company owns a floor space of 20,000 square metres. The bright and commodious workshop, the integrated annex and the beautiful office building form a first-class equipment. The pulverizer from Germany, cocoa expelled and refiner form a productive assembly line processing new to 8,000 metric tonnes cocoa bean per year.

The company is honoured to supply "Xingguang" brand high-quality cocoa butter, cocoa powder, cocoa liquor and cocoa cake etc with the first-class equipment. They are the best choice to produce varies high-quality chocolate and other cocoa foods. They are most welcomed by domestic and foreign customers.

The Company will continue to offer good service for new and old customers and warmly welcome the friends from home and abroad to come and negotiate business.

浙江省紹興市大灘西路 8 號
Add: 8 Datan Road (W) Shaoxing Zhejiang, China
Tel: 0086-0575-8011726 Fax: 0086-0575-8011167
Overseas Agent: Hong Kong Baihua International Trading Co., Ltd.
Flat B, 10/F, Shun Pont Commercial Building, 5-11 Thomson Road, Wanchai, Hong Kong.
Tel: 2866 8312 Fax: 2527 3339

北京新世纪饭店
BEIJING NEW CENTURY HOTEL

北京新世纪饭店
BEIJING NEW CENTURY HOTEL

The Beijing New Century Hotel is an internationally managed five-star luxury hotel conveniently situated in the western part of Beijing. Its 32-floor hotel and 18-floor office tower with luxury guest rooms, apartments and offices, unique restaurants, spacious banquet hall and complete health and recreation facilities make it the ideal place for business people to stay. Our aim to make our service quality #1 will leave you with a lasting impression.

No. 6 Southern Road Capital Gym, Beijing,China
Tel: 68492001 Fax: 68491103 68491104
Postal code: 100044

ANA HOTELS
INTERNATIONAL

Hangzhou Continental Hotel

A modern deluxe hotel situated by the beautiful West Lake, Hangzhou Continental Hotel is located in the hub of the city.

With its many facilities and services, Hangzhou Continental Hotel offers its guests convenience and efficiency. But it is the hotel's sincere, friendly and caring service that travellers really appreciate.

OPENING PROMOTION

(1997. 2. 15 to 1997. 8. 31)

For 90 USD you can enjoy one night's accomodation in a standard room
For 102 USD you can enjoy one night's accomodation in a deluxe room

(Rates are subject to 15% surcharge)

COMPLIMENTARY:

- Breakfast (buffet)
- Daily Chinese/English newspaper
- Fruit basket
- Free pressing of one suit or dress
- Mini chocolate
- One glass Mirco-brewery beer (300 ml, only for Beer house's guests)

SPECIAL RATE:

- 15% discount at all restaurants and bars
- 20% discount at night club, sauna, bowling, snooker, Mahjong room rental, Simulated golf and beauty salon

Extended Check-out time: 14:00pm

CONGRATULATION

Hangzhou Continental Hotel
杭州五洲大酒店

Address: No. 2, Pinghai Road, Hangzhou, China. Post Code: 310006
Tel Number: (0571) 7088088 Fax Number: (0571) 7077618 Reservations: (0571) 7081588

120's
敦煌
FILTER
DunHuang
卷烟厂出品

敦煌

DunHuang

Cigarettes

◆

Dunhuang Grottoes, built up from AD 386–1367 (the Northern Wei Dynasty – the Yuan Dynasty), are among the greatest existing treasure troves of Buddhist art in the world. Dunhuang Cigarettes, one of the famous brand manufactured by Shanghai Cigarette Factory (1925–1995), China.

◆

STIEC 中國煙草上海進出口公司 CHINA TOBACCO I/E SHANGHAI CORP.

地址：中國上海市浦東新區楊高中路2775號
Add: 2775 Yang Gao Road Central, Pudong New Area, Shanghai, China.
電話 Tel: 58336868　傳真 Fax: 86-21-58336059　電傳 Tlx: 33496 SHATO CN　郵編 Post Code: 200135

HK GOVERNMENT
HEALTH WARNING
SMOKING
CAN KILL
MIDDLE TAR

香港政府忠告市民
吸煙
可以致命
焦油含量中

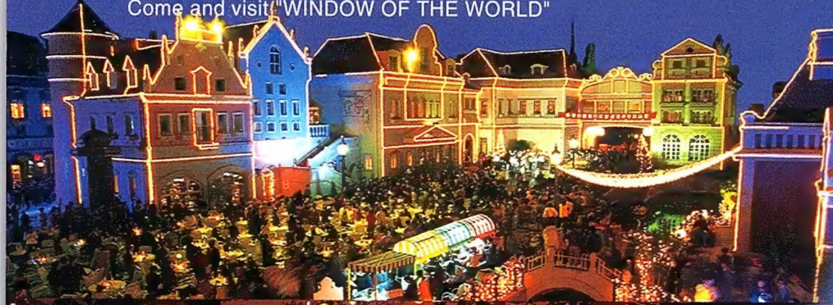
世界之窗

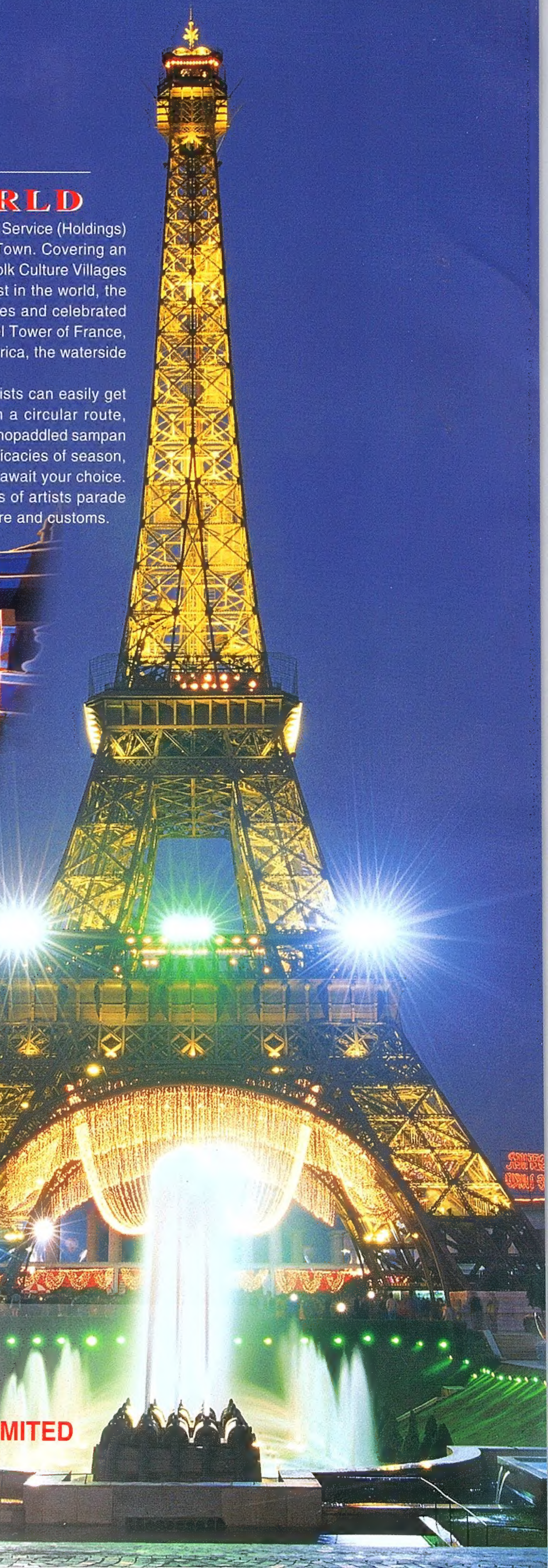
WINDOW OF THE WORLD

This is another one of the largest tourist centres established by China Travel Service (Holdings) Hong Kong Limited in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone Overseas Chinese Town. Covering an area of 480,000 sq.m., it adjoins Splendid China Miniature Scenic Spot and China Folk Culture Villages as well.Here we've assembled the marvellous sights and sites of historical interest in the world, the ancient and modern natural landscapes and attractions as well as dwelling houses and celebrated sculptures, etc., totalling 118 scenic spots. Among them are the world-famous Eiffel Tower of France, the Buckingham Palace of Britain, the Pyramid of Egypt, the Grand Canyon of America, the waterside villages in South-East Asia and Europe-style dwelling houses, etc.

Apart from folklore and theatrical performances in the scenic centre, tourists can easily get access to different means of traffic such as the elevated single-track car with a circular route, electromobile, Europe-style ancient carriage, Gypsy caravan, old-fashioned car, monopaddled sampan and pneumatic raft, etc.. And in the comprehensive service area, we cater the delicacies of season, and handicrafts and souvenirs with consummate skills of various countries, which await your choice. What's more, you may even find entertainment on the Carnival Night when teams of artists parade before you by presenting the delightful programmes of multi-national art and culture and customs.

Come and visit "WINDOW OF THE WORLD"





Shenzhen World Miniature Co., Ltd.
Add: Overseas Chinese Town Shenzhen, China.
Tel: 6608000 Fax: 6602590

CHINA TRAVEL SERVICE (HONG KONG) LIMITED
(General Agent for the Business of "Window of the World" in Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan as well as Overseas) T.A. Licence No.:350273
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